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cover contributed by:
PANDER BROS.
art & colors

UP FRONT

Crude though they were, when the first handful of Comico black-and-whites appeared — bearing titles such as AZ, SKROG, GRENDEL, and SLAUGHTERMAN — their spunky quirkiness caught my attention and fancy.

I even sent the young upstarts a letter, likening their offbeat approach to that of early Marvel (believe it or not, there was a time when titles and characters such as the Hulk and Spider-Man were quirky and offbeat, too).

One thing led to another, and after several phone calls and a lot of information sharing, we decided to get together and conduct an interview — their first — which was published way back in COMICS INTERVIEW #5 (I got a lot of quizzical responses to running a piece on what many considered a fan outfit sure to fail).

After the interview, which was held in a restaurant around the corner from Marvel, I took the guys up to the Bullpen for a tour. Much to my delight, they promptly stuck the self-adhesive Marvel Visitor passes to their foreheads while I marched them through the inner sanctum. I'm sure no one who took notice of them that afternoon suspected that they would one day provide serious competition.

In retrospect, my likening early Comico to early Marvel wasn't so far off the mark. Today, they've grown into a successful publisher of color comics and something of an industry trendsetter. And that's why it's such a personal pleasure to present this special issue of COMICS INTERVIEW celebrating the fifth anniversary of Comico, the Comic Company.

-Dave

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From **TRINA ROBBINS** to **STAN LEE** — from **ROGER ZELAZNY** to **ROBERT BLOCH** — from **WILL EISNER** to **RAY BRADBURY** find out for yourself why they're excited about **MICRA!**

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"We mixed European elements into GRENDEL."

Photo: Alexander Pander

On the left, Pander the Elder (Jacob), and on the right, Pander the Younger (Arnold), back in their native land.

PANDER BROS.

What Comico extravagnza issue would be complete without a peek behind the mysterious facade of those devious Dutch siblings, Jacob and Arnold Pander? I caught them with their bossman, publisher Phil LaSorda, at the San Diego Con.

MARK BORAX: *So, Phil, as publisher, how has Comico surprised you in the past few years since DAK first interviewed you guys?*

PHIL LASORDA: Well, the intent of the company hasn't changed one bit, as far as our approach to the medium. We always thought comics was an American art form, and an art form that was just intense. We wanted to represent to the industry as a whole — not just here, but outside — what comics are looking like today, to get the respect they're getting in Japan and Europe, to create a certain look that you can say, "Yeah, this is not just a comic, it's more than a comic book — what is it?" Also, you can have beautiful pictures but, if it's not going to be a story, it's not going to be worth a bill of beans, it's just a gallery.

MARK: *So in that sense Comico has stayed the same?*

PHIL: I think philosophy-wise, conceptually, once we get behind a project we're behind it 150%; the creators decide what *they* want to do and I say, "Sure, let's see it." Once we talk it out, it's their baby. Once we pick a project, we go gangbusters and make this thing work well for that person. The only thing we ask is that we work with them on that audience level, but it's their baby, they're creating it. And if they love their own work it shows in the book, it shows in the pages, it *jumps off* the book — and it gets away from that formula feeling. I mean Arnold and Jacob working with Matt, there's a certain formula there that works...

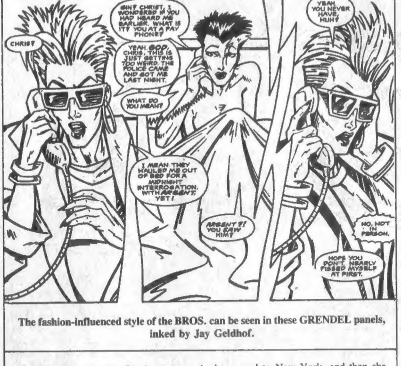
MARK: *They're not being ground down by the corporate machine?*

PHIL: Yeah. We don't come in and stand over them like that.

MARK: *So, what do you think, guys, is Phil bullshitting or is that true? (Laughter.)*

JACOB PANDER: We get whipped nightly.

"The thing about rejection is you start


CHRIST
AIN'T CHRIST, I WONDERS? IF YOU HAF HEARD HE RAFUSED TO PAY TO YOU ANY PHONES
YEAH, GOD, CHRIST, THERE'S SOMEBODY HERE! THE POLICE CAME AND GOT HIS LAST NIGHT.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WHAT?
I MEAN THEY TOOK HIM AWAY! OFF BED FOR A MIDNIGHT INTERROGATION WITH ARSENYE YES!
ARSENY ST YOU SAW HIM?
YEAH, I'LL NEVER HAVE HIM!
NO, NOT IN PERSON.
HOPE YOU ROTTEN HEEBS INVISIBLE AT FIRST!

The fashion-influenced style of the BROS. can be seen in these GRENDEL panels, inked by Jay Geldhof.

MARK: *The Pander Brothers were unknown in comics before GRENDEL. Where'd you guys come from?*

ARNOLD PANDER: A lot of my background is from comics and illustrators and fashion illustration. A lot of the images that we have been working with in the past few years have been probably inspired by having friends in bands and that kind of musical influence. And also fashion, being in touch with fashion illustration, and having that as an interest in growing up.

MARK: *And Jacob?*

JACOB: A strong background in film, filmmaking, and design. Also we should point out that our parents are both artists — father is a fine artist, got his training in the Netherlands — so we grew up in an artistic surrounding of not only being weaned on comic-book art but of being in an artistic atmosphere of classic art.

MARK: *Your father was born in the Netherlands?*

JACOB: Yes, and so were we.

MARK: *When did you move here?*

JACOB: We moved here in 1967 or '68. I was three years old and Arnold was just one, so for Arnold it was a long time ago. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Are both your parents Dutch?*

JACOB: Mother is American, from Portland, Oregon. She traveled to Europe, I think it was right out of art school. First, she moved to New York, and then she went to Europe.

ARNOLD: Where she met this suave European cat.

JACOB: Yeah. Then babies were made.

ARNOLD: Yeah.

JACOB: And then GRENDEL happened. *(Laughter.)*

ARNOLD: Yeah, that's it. We were born to do GRENDEL.

MARK: *Having a parent from the European artistic tradition, do you feel like that's given you a different slant than the average American artist?*

JACOB: It's certainly given us an opportunity in terms of the perspective that we have on art, the way we look at it. It's so hard to generalize on that level, and I can't speak for other artists, but I think that there's a definite sense of being attracted to different kinds of arts from different cultures, because of that. We're not really Dutchmen, but since we have family in Holland it compels us towards — not learning our Dutch roots so much as . . .

ARNOLD: Seeking other influences.

JACOB: Right.

MARK: *What I was getting at is that you may have grown up with more artistic influences than just the football game on TV.*

ARNOLD: Right, and it wasn't as traditional.

JACOB: It's also in analyzing things like football games or Saturday morning cartoons, a sense of analyzing it for its own artistic value. STAR WARS, for instance, came out at that age when we were young and impressionable, and it really inspired us —

ARNOLD: Has it been that long already?

JACOB: I know, that's weird, isn't it. But, you know, we looked at it and it was soaked in, whatever stuff we got off on; but it was also analyzed, probably subconsciously, *from* a broader perspective than just that of another cool science fiction thing.

ARNOLD: That's true, and now we're trying to do more . . . you know, look back at our culture after visiting our family in Europe, and have that influence. We mixed elements of European comic illustration into #9 of GRENDEL. In America there's definite action to the art.

JACOB: It's got an American drive to it.

ARNOLD: Yeah, a very American drive, although we're trying to apply it to kind of different modes.

MARK: *How does GRENDEL have a very American drive? In what ways?*

ARNOLD: Well, I think that our art . . . well —

JACOB: Not on the level of story as much as the approach to how we visualize things. If you look at American films and European films, there's a *definite* stylistic difference in the sense of mood. European films have more of an elegance and a slower quality, whereas American films — even when they are moody and elegant — have much more of an energetic drive at the forefront of the way they are being told.

ARNOLD: More action.

JACOB: We've been weaned on that intense kind of action drive. Even just driving in an American city, you are in that mode.

ARNOLD: Right, you've got bigger cars, bigger freeways, and you're thinking faster.

JACOB: And I think the European roots has kind of made us want to meld the classic, more elegant, mood into that drive.

MARK: *So, Jacob, from your cinematic background, and Arnold, from your fashion background —*

ARNOLD: By the way, I came to the movies with Jacob. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *And he wore clothes too.*

ARNOLD: Yeah, I dressed him. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Well, Phil, how did you ever catch up to these two wild and crazy guys?*

PHIL: Actually, it was **Matt Wagner** who saw their work in a submission. I

Grendel TM and © 1986 Matt Wagner/Comico the Comic Company

thinking 'this will be rejected, but . . .?''

Grendel TM and ©1987 Matheagher/Comico the Comic Company

think they can tell the story better than I can.

ARNOLD: Well, tell it from your side and we'll fill in the pieces.

PHIL: When Matt decided to do GRENDEL he didn't want to draw it, he wanted to write it, and he wanted to end MAGE and take a break, so he was looking for an artist team for the book, and out of the blue these guys showed up on the doorstep. *(Laughter.)*

ARNOLD: Well, it was actually more of a fluke. I wasn't really in touch with Comico or anything. Matt was on tour with MAGE, traveling around the west coast, and he came through Portland, Oregon — I had seen the black-and-white GRENDEL maybe a year before, thought it was kind of bold although it was still in its definite infant stage — and Matt saw some drawings that we had up — we used to just put up superhero drawings to sell.

MARK: *In the local comic shop?*

ARNOLD: Yeah. We would do drawings of Wolverine or the X-Men or Longshot or something while we were working as graphic artists doing logos and illustrations, ad work type of stuff; but the interest was comic books and so I was totally in touch with drawing superheroes in their costumes. Matt saw those on the wall and he left a note saying he was interested in the look and wanted to know if we could actually do storytelling. We were kind of at a point where the graphics was at a low ebb, so we were kind of going, "Hm, do you think we could draw comic books? We did it in high school."

MARK: *So you two guys had a quick huddle and —*

JACOB: Well, it was funny, because we had just probably had a string of maybe ten fairly big jobs that had fallen through and we were eating pizza by the slice. That was it, you know. And we would not get bussing jobs, we wanted to make our money doing art. So we thought, okay, let's put these roughs together. But we didn't think there was any way we were going to get this.

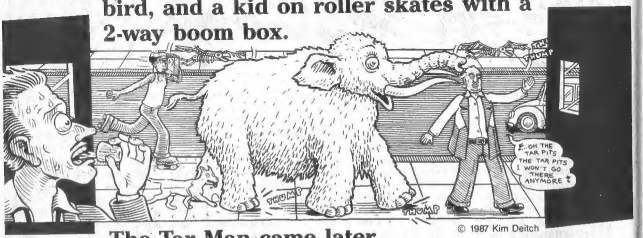
ARNOLD: Yeah, this is too weird looking.

JACOB: We were just so *used to* getting this rejection all of the time.

ARNOLD: Right. The thing about rejection is you start thinking, "This is going to get rejected, but . . ."

PHIL: Matt was still touring and when he got back he had to collect his thoughts and go over these things, but he did say something would be coming in. It came to Comico first. Matt had mentioned to me about both of these guys, but I was floored by it. The stuff was great! It was Matt's baby, and the way we set our company up five years ago and what we're still

Myles Mycroft looked up one day and saw Larry Farrel being followed by a giant mastodon, a ghostly canine, a skeletal bird, and a kid on roller skates with a 2-way boom box.



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"There's no ego battle; who does what better."

doing now is that the creators of their own books make their own decisions as far as the artistic expression they want. If they want to hit a certain audience, we make sure they hit the audience that they want. And we showed the stuff to Matt and he really liked it.

JACOB: We were on the ledge of the building when the phone rang. *(Laughter.)*

ARNOLD: And they just said, "If you can meet the deadlines then you can have the gig."

JACOB: Throughout the thing it took awhile to get used to. The first two issues we were trying to get the hang of working in the comic-book form, and by issue #6 and #7 we had more of a kind of a grasp on what we were doing.

MARK: *So, how do you feel about the run so far?*

JACOB: I feel great about it. The thing that we've always done, you know, is we've worked in the collaborative sense as the **Pander Brothers**, just basically as a unit putting our aesthetic into the things that we work on, be it film, graphics, whatever. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *How do you collaborate with each other?*

JACOB: On the pencils, we conceptualize it together and design it.

MARK: *So you both do breakdowns?*

JACOB: Yeah, exactly. I mean, we both kind of sit behind each other and come up with inspirations or whatever.

ARNOLD: I'm stronger in the figure art, so mostly predominantly that was the characters —

JACOB: Arnold's strong in figure art. Arnold is *powerful*, he makes *strong* figures. *(Laughter.)*

ARNOLD: I just like muscles. Jacob has just always had a real strong design sense on every level.

JACOB: They're both integrated, in terms of the physical element of the characters being integrated into the layouts. The breakdowns are more of an overall aesthetic idea as to how we want to approach it in terms of the mood of it, and we both kind of do that. And then we kind of strut our individual stuff when it comes to actually illustrating it.

ARNOLD: And there's no ego battle in terms of who does what better.

JACOB: Yeah.

MARK: *But you know each other's strengths and weaknesses?*

JACOB: Exactly. The first phase is that we design it, "I've got this great idea, let's do it like this!"

MARK: *And what if you say that and Arnold says he doesn't think that's so great?*

ARNOLD: That has happened.

JACOB: But we usually agree. Maybe one of us will be inspired to do something really ridiculous and then the other one makes you are aware of that.

ARNOLD: One example is #11 — the deadline pressure on that one to get it pencilled was really tight — and we were working on two separate things, we were on different schedules. I got up at mid-

night to lay this thing out — the first half of it was kind of the conversation sequence and the mood interpreted from Matt's script with the metamorphosis of the relationship between Brian and Cristine, so that first ten pages or so was predominately mine. Actually, it surprised Jacob a little bit when he saw it. I remember in the script it saying they eventually wind up

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SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #23 **Battling for his life and his sanity, young Aramis Merrow faces spirits only he can see. Are they truly spirits from his past come to destroy him? Or do they exist only in his over-stressed mind? Beyond the aid of the other Southern Knights, Aramis must fight alone against foes beyond mortal comprehension!**

by Henry Vogel

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"Thank God for Jim and Tammy . . ."

in bed, and I couldn't imagine drawing them kind of going, "Well, I guess we should head over to the bed," so I ended off the sequence with a kiss which seemed like the final moment of their love scene and then you turn the page to a full shot of them interacting in a wonderful manner.

JACOB: Torrid is the word.

MARK: *How does that fit in with the question of sometimes someone does something crazy and the other points that out?*

ARNOLD: Well, Jacob came along and saw it, and I said, "Should we do this?" and Jacob said, "Yeah, let's do it."

MARK: *So he encouraged you to go farther?*

ARNOLD: Yeah. Sometimes —

JACOB: It works both ways.

ARNOLD: Sometimes on things we'll kind of individually go "ugh" and sometimes it's like should we go for it.

MARK: *Phil, what did you think of that torrid scene?*

PHIL: I thought it was great. The problem that we had to face with that scene was we're on the newsstand. If you look at GRENDEL it is "Parental Guidance Suggested" on the book — we were faced with the decision of either taking it off the newsstands or taking it out altogether, and we didn't want to do that because it's not our policy. We're not out to do censorship. As a company we design our structure with each individual book. Matt knew what audience he wanted before he even started. He knew we'd have the label on the book "PG" — Matt wanted the label because of the violence. It's no worse than MIAMI VICE, I think, or even CRIME STORY, but we knew we'd have that just to play it safe 'cause all of the stuff was hitting the fan about censorship and comics and everything. We wanted to play it safe. Thank God for Jim and Tammy and all that, it's taken the eyes off everything right now. But we had to make a decision. We knew we were on the newsstands, MICKEY MOUSE is right next to GRENDEL on the racks, and there are people that don't pay attention.

MARK: *What did you feel your responsibility was as publisher at that point?*

PHIL: The responsibility was to Matt. We went and said, "Matt, this is your book, this is the audience you wanted to reach, let's try to keep it that way. Let's be fair to the fans of the book."

MARK: *So Matt decided to put the arm in?*

PHIL: We decided as a group to let Matt know, and Matt agreed.

JACOB: And we understood that.

ARNOLD: And I would like to definitely state that in the finished product, I actually was happier with the intensity of the illustration.

JACOB: There was a compensation in visual intensity, so what we couldn't get

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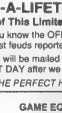

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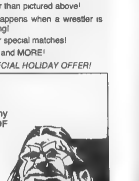

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"Burden and Adams had love and passion."

away with, let's make it more intense, so the physicality of him kind of pulling the hair back with Cris and her scratching his back, it just kind of gives it more of a *feeling* of passion

ARNOLD: Yeah, there's more feeling to that scene than when it was overt.

PHIL: Another factor is that, if this book wasn't on the newsstands, it wouldn't have made a damn bit of difference — we would have kept it the way it was, and that's a very important thing. We had to make a decision of either to take it off the newsstands, that one issue — but it's one of our better selling newsstand books — or redraw.

JACOB: And there was a miscommunication why it was drawn in the first place. We just didn't know what the agreement was between Matt and Comico.

PHIL: There was a lot of fighting tooth and nail within the company of what we wanted to do on that whole censorship thing —

ARNOLD: Just making it hard for everybody. *(Laughter.)*

PHIL: I thought the resolution that we came up with and how it was handled was amazing. It was just great.

ARNOLD: Actually, I must say that I feel lucky to have the first project that we've worked on connected to a company that thinks that the actual individual project is worth holding out for and finding out how to approach it and give it a lot of support.

JACOB: And then carrying it off with quality, printing it on high quality paper so that you can see it and say this is a quality piece, whether it's superheroes or science fiction or whatever.

PHIL: And that approach we do also with our licenses. You know, GUMBY is GUMBY. If we had just done it and put any artist and writer on it I don't think it would have been any good, I don't think it would have had the love and the passion that it had from **Bob Burden** and **Art Adams.** These two guys loved each other and respected each other so much, and we realized the fans would appreciate a book by these two guys — what a unique team —

MARK: *It would be hard to imagine anybody else doing GUMBY the way they did.*

PHIL: Yeah, it was an amazing thing. And that's our approach as a whole, is putting together a formula that works and really standing behind that group of people, and really fighting for them. We do that as a company and we're proud of everything that we do.

MARK: *Do you guys have a new project that you want to do?*

Grendel TM and © 1987 Matthedgler/Comico the Comic Company

"Our whole look basically says we're

JACOB: Right now we're developing a film that we're going to be producing in Portland.

ARNOLD: It's a short film, and right now we're in the situation where we're getting the people that we want to be involved with. It's not going to be a major feature film, it's a vision that we've had that we've wanted for a year or so now to produce on whatever level we can get it produced on.

MARK: *What about in the comics field, do you have any plans?*

JACOB: The next step for us is, basically, to propose our own concept to Comico.

ARNOLD: But right now we've pencilled the first issue of GINGER FOX, working with **Mike Baron** on this four-issue mini-series, and if you think that's going to look like an L.A. GRENDEL, don't worry

JACOB: It's beautiful so far.

ARNOLD: It's a whole approach that we're taking based on Oriental fashion illustration, and I've been experimenting with these kind of cubist cartoon images for the characters that are more of the bad guys or the villains, those characters that are not the main figures. So it has a real stylistic look to it, moreso I think than GRENDEL — more linear.

MARK: *And what's in the future for Phil Lasorda?*

PHIL: Well, tonight it'll be a couple of the con parties. In reference to Comico, to continue to try to diversify the line a little bit more, to cover all genres of books. With GRENDEL you have a horror/suspense type book, with RIO and GINGER you've got westerns and romance, and the superhero stuff — we just want to get whatever we do to a large audience. We're expanding our distribution, our circulation, as the year goes on. We're getting a lot of response from a lot of outside companies on what we're doing, and that's one of the reasons we got MAX HEADROOM. We're just trying to put comics back on the map. We're increasing our line very slowly because we don't want to take too much of a dollar away from the fans who buy our books. We do have a very loyal following, I'm finding out. So we're expanding slowly. We don't want 14 million titles. Our growth is a slow growth, it's a planned growth, and we're right on schedule with that as far as what we want to publish. We will be adding some new titles, one of which will be MAZE AGENCY by **Mike Barr,** and then of course the GINGER FOX graphic novel, **Dave Stevens'** ROCKETEER ADVENTURE MAGAZINE with **Michael Kaluta.** So we have products coming out that are really going to give us better recognition, get us more Kirby Award nominations. *(Laughter.)*

And we'll just continue to make that statement that we decided up front five years ago. There's so many projects and things, and we're getting bigger names

Grendel TM and © 1987 Matt Wagner/Comico the Comic Company

here and screw everybody else —"

saying we're really doing some nice stuff. One of the bigger competitors, DC, they are so behind us in what we do and wish they could do the same kind of structure.

MARK: *In what sense?*

PHIL: Just the way we're set up. I think a lot of them wish that they could . . .

MARK: *Cut through the corporate bullshit?*

PHIL: Exactly. They really are behind what we're doing. **Dick Giordano** always tells me these things, and I really appreciate his comments, I respect the man a lot.

MARK: *Do you think that people recognize a Comico book as being a Comico book?*

PHIL: Yes, oh, God. Our look, we're not using the same paper stock as everyone else, and everything has a certain look; our coloring technique, we offer over 400 color variations. The other companies could do it, but we give our separators a little bit more time to do it, and there's a big difference there.

MARK: *How do you do that?*

PHIL: We just schedule it. **Diana Schutz** is doing a hell of a job. I don't know how Diana can put up with the deadlines and the craziness that she does, I could never do that.

MARK: *Well, the reason that I ask is that, as you know, there's a million publishers around but very few of them seem to have an identity. Marvel, for all of the crap, you can almost always identify a Marvel book because it does have some kind of identity.*

PHIL: Right, yeah, and the same thing with DC. Our identity, I think, is in our production. We spend the extra dollar for the creative team. A good example is RIO, the graphic novel; we had to go back to the separators something like four times to make that come out right, and it's a fine color print job.

MARK: *That's a really nice book.*

PHIL: And we went out of our way for that because we loved the work, it's beautiful, and it deserved to be displayed that way. We're not afraid to lose money on something, either. I mean, you hate to lose money on a project, but you're doing *for* the future, like an investment. We invest in projects. Look at GINGER FOX, we were trying to create a new market when we did that graphic novel, and I think it's really going to take off. We're getting a lot of press on GINGER FOX, a lot of recognition across the country, outside the industry. It didn't sell like gangbusters as a graphic novel in the beginning, but it still keeps selling during the year and I think when the series comes out it's going to work real well. But, like I said, our look — our whole look, and it's basically an artistic look — says we're here and screw everybody else, and if you don't like the way our books look then you don't have to buy them. *(Laughter.)*

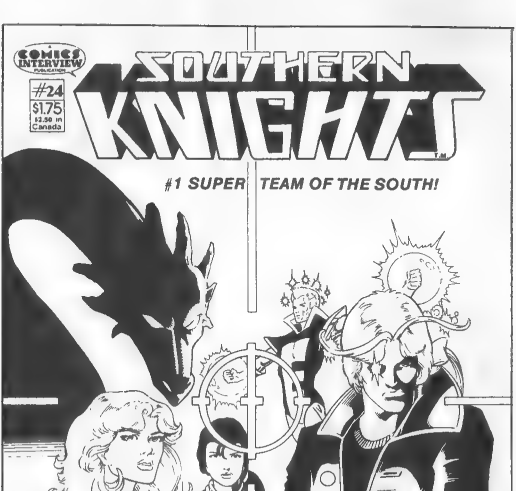
MARK: *Phil Lasorda, publisher.*

PHIL: I publish the things that I like. People ask, you know, how we come up with so many good products — I think it would be fun to publish it, I think it would be fun working with these people. Once the company's really into the project, it's a lot of fun. And we get along, we don't have infighting in the company like you hear about with other publishers.

ARNOLD: Because we're all hundreds

I AM SO HOPING TO HAVE ANOTHER TASTE OF YOU, THEN.
ONE WAS ENOUGH TO MAKE YOURSELF SHINE OUT TO ME.
AND YOU ARE SO VERY TASTY THAT YOU SHINE, OH, SO VERY BRIGHT.
YOU'RE REALLY NOT HARD TO FIND AT ALL, ARE YOU?
MY, BUT WHAT A LOVELY CREATURE YOU ARE. VERY FIRM.
THERE HE SAT...
...HIS FEET ON MY BED, AS SUDDENLY THE ROOM STANK OF SULFUR.

Grendel TM and © 1987 Matheny/Comico the Comic Company



SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #24 **Zephyr Flint, head of VIPER, suddenly finds himself at the wrong end of an assassin's rifle. Knowing no one else he can turn to for protection, Flint goes to his enemies, the Southern Knights! But Flint isn't the only one from the Knights' past to pop up! Synergy, the assassins Carl & Larry, and Serpent form the strangest team in comics history — all in SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #24!**

by Henry Vogel

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"We're publishing MAX HEADROOM."

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and thousands of miles away. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *The secret to a tightly run organization: Federal Express. Is there anything we haven't talked about yet?*

PHIL: Well, you know we're publishing MAX HEADROOM. That's a licensed property that we got because of how we treat our licenses, how we do things. The book hasn't come out yet, but we've put in tons of money, and it's a real experience waiting for approvals and stuff, because we never had to do approvals overseas before.

MARK: *The two-edged sword of licensing.*

PHIL: You've got it. These guys are waiting for approval on pencils so that they can get the inking done, on the MAX HEADROOM book, approval from England. And they can also say they don't like the pencils and want them redone, or they don't like the art team — they can say that. That's the wonderful world of licensing, they can say no and we'll have to accept it.

ARNOLD: So we're kind of in limbo right now.

MARK: *You guys are waiting for Max Headroom to give you the go-ahead. (Laughter.)*

ARNOLD: The reason we're excited to be working on this project is, well — I remember in pencilling it being pretty hyped on just the idea of working in 3-D, you know, and manipulating the pencil work and all of that to *do the 3-D comic.* That's really exciting.

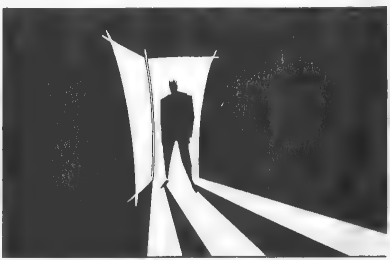
PHIL: And I saw some of the pages, you know, like the big hand pointing off the page into your face. And the big gun, it's got like this *huge* cannon for the gun.

ARNOLD: Like, yeah, *super 3-D.*

JACOB: Consistently through the GRENDEL stuff we've designed it with a definite foreground/background approach, so the art has always been dimensionally in tune with that element.

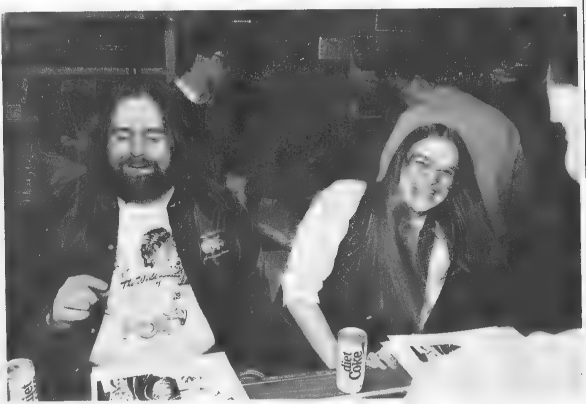
ARNOLD: The depth element.

PHIL: And there's one thing, besides MAX and a lot of the stuff that we're doing, a lot of people want to read about what is behind every book that we've done, and in October we're coming out with something we're calling THE COMICO BLACK BOOK which is a history of our first five years. It covers everything that we've published, with a little insight from every creator, why they did it, what was the reason behind it. So everybody can get an update on what we've done, and even on future products like THE ROCKETEER, like MAZE AGENCY, and so on and so forth. It's all going to be in there. It's like THE MARVEL UNIVERSE in a way, but it's a lot better, as far as the way it's being handled, and it's got a great lineup.



Grendel TM and ©1987 Matheragner/Comico the Comic Company

"Comics are not targeted at children . . ."



Walt and Weezie. Carol and Richard. Christy and Peter. Frank and Lynn. Famous comics industry couples, all. And now, the Administrative and Editorial branches of Comico.

I've heard fans clamor about how most comics women road into the industry on the coattails of a man. This may be true, but it's probably just as true that most comics men also rode in on the coattails of other men. Be that as it may, Bob and Diana are two strong independent forces guiding the helm of Starship Comico. Here's how they do it. . .

PETER SANDERSON: *Over the last year or so there has been interest in rock magazines on comics. Do you see a link between fandom for rock and fandom for comics; and if there isn't much now, can one be built?*

DIANA SCHUTZ: I think the link between the two, frankly, is the age group. Comics are not targeted at children anymore; they're targeted at adolescents and young adults, and that's the primary consumer base of the record market. As to how to make that link effective for the comics industry, if comics could be distributed via record stores —

BOB SCHRECK: Which is happening now without anyone's help. There are several punk fashion and New Music-oriented stores that are actually going out and looking for comics, and some good distributors that are seeking *them* out, as well. When people are that age, they are looking for the next experience musically. They are not set solid against any form of entertainment, particularly a form that can be, as comics are more and more these days, a very personal statement.

DIANA: Also, in terms of what we publish, a book like GRENDEL would have more appeal to that consumer base than, say, the ROBOTECH titles. ROBOTECH has its audience. GRENDEL is targeted at young adults.

PETER: *Do you see Comico then as striving to develop different audiences? It seem to me that the major companies are concern-*

DIANA SCHUTZ & BOB SCHRECK

"I owe Steve Gerber my career."

ed with mass appeal, even if it's defined as the whole direct-sales market. Is Comico interested in developing specific audiences?

DIANA: We look at ourselves as publishers, and, like any other publisher, we produce books for a *variety* of audiences, some of which intersect, and some of which may be completely exclusive. In that sense Comico is trying to establish as wide an audience as possible. A 30-year-old woman is not necessarily interested in what a five-year-old boy is interested in, so why produce for the lowest common denominator? Why not produce something for the five-year-old boy and something else for the 30-year-old female?

PETER: *How is it that a former teacher of logic and philosophy became involved in the comics business?*

DIANA: I think that the academic system has lost sight of reality. I got very disenchanted with the whole academic scene, the game, and left to go sell funnybooks.

PETER: *Had you been reading funnybooks as you were growing up?*

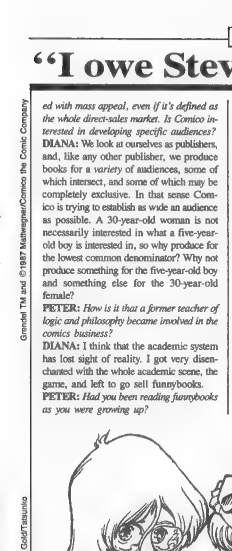
DIANA: As a child, yes. I rediscovered my interest in college.

PETER: *Is there a particular reason, particular things in the books?*

DIANA: HOWARD THE DUCK brought me back. To some extent I owe **Steve Gerber** my career. HOWARD grappled with philosophical issues, and I found that particularly interesting in light of what I was studying. At the same time comics were quick entertainment, and as a college student who had to spend hours reading complex philosophical passages, it was nice to break from that, though I wasn't able to break for too long. To break for 20 minutes to read HOWARD, which had some relevance to what I was studying but also presented the lighter side of it, was refreshing and appealing and eventually consuming.

PETER: *And how is it, Bob, that you became interested in comics, not just as a hobby but as a career?*

BOB: That was kind of a natural progression. I grew up hating the idea of being



Above: A happy ROBOTECH couple. Above and to the right: Your average New York cop, rendered GRENDEL style.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Diana Schutz
Occupation: Editor in chief, Comico The Comic Company
Born: 1 February 1955 — Montreal, Canada
Books Edits: GRENDEL; JONNY QUEST; any of the special projects that we do; and I supervise the whole line
Favorite Comic Apart From Those Edits: LOVE AND ROCKETS
Favorite Works of Prose Fiction: ALICE'S ADVENTURES THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS and GRAVITY'S RAINBOW
Goal In Life: To move back to California and live the good life

Name: Bob Schreck
Occupation: Administrative Director, Comico The Comic Company
Born: 2 February 1955 — Glen Cove, Long Island, NY
Favorite Comic Apart From Comico Publications: CONCRETE
Favorite Music: A wide and varied amount of music, anywhere from country to progressive jazz; **Jethro Tull**
Favorite Food: Shrimp parmigiana with spaghetti
Favorite Movies: CITIZEN KANE; 2001; GREASER'S PALACE
Goal In Life: To feel as if I have accomplished something

Grendel TM and ©1987 Matheregan/Comico the Comic Company
©1987 Harmony Gold/Tatsunoko

"I started out sweeping the floor!"

caught holding a comic, so I did not actually read them until I was about 14 or 15 years old, maybe older —

PETER: *Because you thought they were trash and —*

BOB: I just thought they were for little kids. I was a real film buff. I got every book that I could on film, studied film, made flip movies. I illustrated, I drew like a lunatic. Science fiction really got me. It was John Christopher and Edgar Rice Burroughs and the Science Fiction Book Club from Doubleday, with all of the wonderful Frazetta covers, that got me interested; and then my friend Larry said to read this comic book, I think it was a FANTASTIC FOUR. I thought it was great, and then I got into it and read a lot of the SPIDER-MANs, which I loved.

And then I read SWAMP THING and I said, "Gee, this is great, the emphasis is on art and a good story instead of just being, 'By the holy wrath of my underwear I'm going to punch you in the nose!' " *(Laughter.)* That did it for me. I started realizing that there were some really hot stories there. And so throughout my many travels I would always circle around the industry, going to conventions, you know — the early conventions. I got to know a lot of people in the industry, and proved that I was confident and capable of maintaining myself in a crisis situation, which often happens at a con. Then one thing led to another, my band —

PETER: *What was the name of your band?*

BOB: Pelucidar.

PETER: *Did this band ever perform at a Creation Con?*

BOB: Yes, we did, and they got many letters saying the con really stunk except for the band. *(Laughter.)* And then, eventually, I began working for Creation.

PETER: *What was your title at Creation?*

BOB: They didn't have titles. I did everything they wouldn't do. I learned by watching my peers and my employers. I learned a lot about what not to do.

PETER: *What makes a good convention?*

BOB: The fans have to feel as if they are a part of what's happening. If they feel like you are relating to them — I think that's what made me popular at the Creation Cons, because I didn't just attach a dollar sign to every head. I took the time, spoke to them, and if they had a problem, I tried to handle it just as I would with anyone else. Everyone had the same importance there, and I think that was one of the things that kept Creation going for quite a while. But when you cut the fans out, when they become just another dollar, they feel it.

PETER: *You're talking about creating some sense of occasion.*

BOB: Right.

DIANA: Bob brings the same attitude to Comico, toward our dealings with fans and the people who buy our books. People call on Saturday or after five o'clock wanting to know when the next issue of whatever is going to be shipped, or with other questions that might normally drive someone insane, and Bob has the patience and temerity to deal with that.

PETER: *Diana, you moved from Canada to California and became involved with Comics and Comix. What was your official title there pre-TELEGRAPH WIRE?*

DIANA: Gee, I'm not sure. I started out sweeping the floor!

PETER: *But you knew you'd work your way up, or hoped.*

DIANA: I knew I'd be in California, hanging out on the beach, looking at palm trees, and that was enough for me at the time. I went through a variety of titles. I guess prior to editing THE TELEGRAPH WIRE I was assistant manager of their flagship store in Berkeley. I became assistant buyer of old comics for the chain. I helped systematize the back issues for all seven stores.

PETER: *And then Comics and Comix decided to start their own fanzine and you became the editor of the celebrated TELEGRAPH WIRE.*

DIANA: May it rest in peace. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *What did you try to do with THE TELEGRAPH WIRE? How did you try to make it stand out from other fanzines?*

DIANA: I wanted the WIRE to be a little more homey than professional fanzines.

After working promotion for Mike Friedrich's STAR* REACH AGENCY, and editing THE TELEGRAPH WIRE newsletter for Comics and Comix of Berkeley, CA, Diana moved to Pennsylvania and Comico.

"Diana is known for her feminist ideals."

"When a female walks in, she is suspect."

More art stolen from Diana's stint at Comics and Comix. Here and opposite.

First of all it *looked* a little more homey because it wasn't as slick; it was typewritten as opposed to typeset. I wanted it to be a little friendlier than most fanzines. But I also had a job to do; it had to serve as a retail/promotional tool. What we tried to feature on the cover were books that we felt deserved more sales than they were getting, quality material that just was not being picked up the way it ought to have been. We tried to promote those titles, and in point of fact the WIRE did do that. Our sales tended to rise pretty consistently on whatever had been cover-featured that month, and also, surprisingly enough, did not plummet the month afterwards.

PETER: *You used to tell me how different Comics and Comix was set up compared to the comics shops I was used to on the East Coast, that you felt they were doing it right. How do you feel that was true?*

DIANA: One of the things that Comics and Comix was definitely doing right was that they had moved into the '80s. Their fixtures were modular, the lights were bright, they changed their window display once a week, and they presented themselves as a class act. They started out being a bunch of guys who loved comics, collected comics, and put together a store. You have to grow beyond that. You have to understand that you're selling a product, that you are a *retailer.* You have to learn the tricks of retailing. You have to *attract* people to your store if you want to *increase* your consumer base.

I recall speaking to one store manager, recently, about point of purchase items. A point of purchase item is something small, located by your cash register, and designed to draw in shoppers other than the regular customers. This fellow's store is in a mall, and cards and buttons were suggested to him as a means of pulling in some of the young adolescent female market. His response was, "I don't want those giggly girls in my store." Those giggly girls have money to spend, and that should have been his bottom line. Comics and Comix, on the other hand, stocked everything. Although new comics were their primary sales, they stocked a variety of related and unrelated items.

BOB: And had personnel made up of both sexes. 99.9% of all of the comics stores in the country are male owned and operated. Just by the nature of the way they are set up, when a female walks in, she is suspect. It's as if she's just walked into a Playboy Club - men only. But when you go into Comics and Comix you find a lot of women working there.

DIANA: And the stores are clean. They just in general are more appealing places to walk into. The flagship Berkeley store is on the main walkway toward the UC-Berkeley campus. There's a tremendous amount of foot traffic, so you have to take advantage of that foot traffic, but if you don't make your store look safe and interesting and appealing to walk into, then you're going to be stuck with the 15-year-old boys. Or not even 15-year-old boys, that's not fair — but you're going to be stuck with the set audience, the already converted, who will walk into the dusty "garage" and take the cats off the back issues in order to look through them. There's no point to only servicing those who are already your clientele. If you can't expand beyond that, then ultimately your business and this industry will die.

PETER: *As a person who worked as a retailer, and as a person who worked with conventions, and as people who are now working at a major comics company, what is your opinion of the ratings controversy?*

BOB: A lot of bruised egos, a lot of hoopla over nothing. There is no controversy. There is no **Edwin Meese**. They already tried to get the record industry and **Frank Zappa** spoke quite well for us all, thank you.

DIANA: Bob and I have various areas of disagreement on this so-called controversy, which I think is pretty healthy. It's a complex issue that affects not only comics but all literature and all forms of entertainment, and I don't think any one of us is going to come up with the perfect solution. Nonetheless, one area that Bob and I agree on absolutely is that there seems to be a real contradiction in terms when you are using the superhero genre to tackle what are supposed to be meaningful, thematically complex, adult topics.

PETER: *Even in WATCHMEN, say?*

DIANA: Alan Moore did an important piece with that series. He took a genre that, let's not delude ourselves, is tailored to 15-year-old males and stretched out its boundaries to their logical conclusion. He took the typically adolescent power fantasy to, one might even say, its only possible end. That's a *different* approach than using the superhero archetype to deal with subjects that might get an R or X-rating in the movie industry.

BOB: Which is not to say that the medium cannot deal with more adult themes. **Art Spiegelman** . . .there's a whole list —

DIANA: Right **Art Spiegelman** deals with adult themes, but he doesn't take a superhero to do it.

PETER: *And then somebody will say, "Yeah, but he took mice."*

DIANA: Yes, but the genre is in service to the story he's telling, as with WAT-

"Gratuitous genitalia ain't gonna do it."

CHMEN. What's essential is that the story be paramount and the genre best suited to deal with the thematic aspects of the story.

PETER: *Getting back to the original subject, Comico does advisories.*

DIANA: We do. Let me give you Comico's policy. First of all we have two sorts of projects, creator-owned and licensed. With licensed properties we are essentially at the mercy of the licensor. our licensed properties so far are "G-rated" properties; that's the way we have to keep them.

BOB: But the same person who reads MAUS, ELEKTRA, or DARK KNIGHT, can read, say, JONNY QUEST #6, and say, "This is one of the greatest comic book stories I've ever read." It didn't have breasts being ripped open, it didn't have male and female genitalia, but it certainly wasn't pandering to nine-year-olds. If you want the medium to mature, make it look better. Give it better paper, better production values, a story worth reading, and you'll get there. Throwing in gratuitous genitalia ain't gonna do it.

DIANA: Something intended for the widest audience possible needn't be bland, needn't be insipid, needn't be stupid. Anyone can read ALICE'S ADVENTURES THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, it's not bland or insipid, and it sure as hell isn't stupid. So, we have our licensed properties which tend to be "G-rated" and we work within those boundaries to make them good and accessible to all readers.

Then we have creator-owned properties. We take creator-ownership very seriously. When we negotiate a contract with a creator, we determine at the time of negotiation which audience they wish to target. If they choose an older audience, that's fine, we support that. But because we have our books distributed nationwide on newsstands, we feel the need to put an advisory on those books that will be for an older audience. We tell the creators this at the outset. The advisory puts the responsibility right where it damn well ought to be, in the hands of the parents; it reads "Parental Guidance Suggested."

So Comico's policy as regards this whole censorship issue is to discuss the situation honestly with the creator beforehand, to determine the best possible course of action, and once we have determined it to stick with it.

PETER: *What do you feel is the role of the editor with regard to creator-owned projects?*

DIANA: We have a real "hands off"

STALKING THE FAR-FLUNG FUTURE OF 1965 WITH ZOT!™ CREATOR SCOTT McCLOUD.

"I firmly believe in creator's rights."

editorial policy, contrary to what **Dave Sim** may think about editors in general! The work of a writer and the work of an editor involve two distinct sets of skills, and at Comico I stress the fact that we will not interfere with anybody's script, creator-owned or licensor-owned, without discussing it with the writer. I *will* without consultation clean up grammar, spelling, and punctuation, unless the writer instructs me otherwise and gives me good reason not to make any of those changes. But the job of an editor is more organizational than creative.

PETER: *So if a script comes in and you feel that there are problems with this you will call the creator and discuss it?*

DIANA: Always. Although, unlike Marvel, DC, and First, Comico doesn't own a set of characters, so there is no corporate imperative to preserve some kind of "editorial vision," and I'm much more comfortable, anyway, with the idea of creators being free to do what they do best. "Hack'n'slash" just isn't my style. I was around before creators got any royalties or rights, and I firmly believe in the rights of the creator. I also firmly believe that the role of the editor is to be the liaison between the creator and the company. It's a very difficult role to play; it's a very difficult position to hold.

BOB: It's sure enough a tough one to live with! *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *The two of you have told me in the past that you were pleased with being able to work, now that you're at a comics company, with people in the industry whose work you had admired in the past.*

DIANA: That's certainly true. I grew up reading DCs, my big time heroes were **Murphy Anderson** and **Carmine Infantino,** and most recently I got to work with both of them on separate issues of JONNY QUEST. They both did outstanding jobs. They were gracious and kind, they didn't let their egos interfere with the work, and they produced via those talented, talented minds and hands two of the most beautiful issues of JONNY QUEST that I have ever seen.

BOB: **Steve Bissette** and **John Totleben,** that was a kick. You know, we haven't published a lot of their work, but they were involved in the GRENDEL graphic novel and that was a real perk for me. Steve did the bumper sticker for **Pellucidar** several years ago. **Tommy Yeates,** too, even more so because I knew him better than all of those guys. He did a whole issue of JONNY QUEST. At the conventions I got to know everybody, and just to be able to sit back and see them having a good time, and offer them work that they're going to enjoy, not just stuff they're going to crank out gives me a good feeling.

I know that often in my travels throughout this industry, at various conventions, my humor tends to lean toward getting a joke out of many of the *negative* aspects of this community that we live in. However, there are some stellar individuals out there. Being able to work in this industry with someone like **Archie Goodwin** as a peer is a real pleasure. He's one of the coolest guys I know. He really has been one of my inspirations.

PETER: *Well, we can't leave Diana's career with Comics and Comix without bringing up the topic of Wonder Woman.*

DIANA: Oh, you're really going to bring that up!

BOB: Yeah, yeah. I'll supply the photo. *(Diana gives Bob a mock glare.)* No, I won't, strike that.

PETER: *I've got a photo.*

DIANA: **Tom Walton,** through incredible manipulative tactics, convinced me to appear on a local TV show called CREATURE FEATURES, hosted by **John Stanley,** who is a very nice man —

PETER: *We must point out, Diana is well known for her feminist ideals.*

DIANA: Yes. Well, **John Stanley** runs horror movies interspersed with short interviews, and somehow I was hornswoggled

Watch out! Here comes Jade from JOHNNY QUEST. Armed and dangerous.

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"I was hornswaggled onto this show."

onto this show wearing a Wonder Woman outfit that was one size too small.

BOB: But the photos look great.

DIANA: I'm not sure I'll *ever* live that one down.

BOB: We'll make damn sure you *never* live that one down! *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *Both of you had careers at Marvel.*

BOB: Yes. Mine was a little bit longer than Diana's. Mine was due to **Carol Kalish**, whose assistant, **Lea Sapp**, moved away, and they were looking for someone to handle the upcoming summer conventions. They knew that I certainly knew how to

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"My Marvel career lasted four days."

negotiate with travel agents and whatnot, so I handled the entire Marvel summer convention season, along with helping **Steve Saffel** and **Carol Kalish** put together some retailer programs. But Carol initially got in touch with me to do a Marvel 25th anniversary convention program. Instead we got the New Universe.

DIANA: "Nuff said. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *Diana, what about your career at Marvel?*

DIANA: My short-lived career at Marvel.

BOB: Four days.

PETER: *The record for an assistant editor.*

DIANA: Oh, really? Well, I must say that some people at Marvel were very good to me. **Ann Nocenti** bent over backwards to get me in as her assistant. **Chris Claremont** campaigned for me in the first place. **Jim Shooter** to some extent went out of his way to have me hired. There were a number of reasons why I only lasted four days. Probably one of the most telling was the fact that I was commuting two hours a day each way, hating every minute of it. As a former hippie I realized that I had now joined the bourgeois commuter rat race.

BOB: The ultimate reluctant yuppie.

DIANA: I did learn quite a bit in my short stay, though. I learned how to do schedules from **Virginia Romita**, for which I thank her from the bottom of my heart! That is what has kept Comico on schedule for the last two years, since I've been here.

BOB: Strike that, we want Virginia to keep her job! *(Laughter.)*

DIANA: But the commute was very bad, and I really didn't feel comfortable as part of a large corporation. Comico offered me a job — Comico offered Bob a job —

PETER: *More or less simultaneously.*

DIANA: — with more money, more autonomy, and more responsibility.

BOB: Less travel. Although it did mean moving to Pennsylvania.

DIANA: Yes. As a fan I had felt that working for Marvel would be sort of the pie-in-the-sky dream, and what I discovered was I was not living my dream. I was working for a Manhattan corporation. I went there with the idealism of a fan and quickly learned the reality of the situation, and knew that I did not want to work for a big corporation.

BOB: I didn't have that problem.

PETER: *In fact, Bob was well known for coming to work dressed in . . . non-business suits. (Laughter.)*

BOB: I was the only person on the business floor to wear a Cerebus T-shirt, spikes, mirror sunglasses, shorts and sandals — aside from **Chris Claremont**, who would occasionally stumble on that floor and be turned away!

PETER: *What is it like working with licenses, especially with regard to a project you recently tried to obtain the rights to?*

BOB: He's talking, of course, about the Church Lady! *(Laughter.)* Anyway, DARK SHADOWS was basically something that **Richard Howell** phoned me about. I remember the show from when I was growing up, and I remember hearing that there were huge conventions with lots of fans, so I had my assistant go through the FANDOM DIRECTORY and discovered that 90% of it was filled with DARK SHADOWS fan clubs: "Gee, I think there's a market here." This is a bunch of good characters that I knew were fun, so I started researching the license. It took me six months to finally get some answers to several letters I had sent; I started off, of course, with **Dan Curtis** and then moved on to ABC Licensing.

I then hit a wall by the name of **Jenny**

Artist Richard Howell tries his hand at JONNY QUEST.

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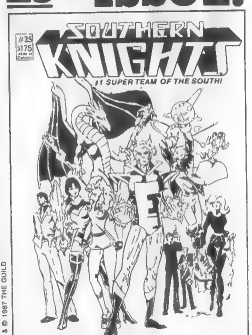

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"• It's been a while since I've recommended *Southern Knights* (Comics Interview, $1.75 each) but my enthusiasm for it has not waned. I haven't a lot of space and time to spare, so let me just reiterate that this is a super-hero team based in Atlanta, the writing is by the extremely able Henry Vogel and the very good art is by Willie Peppers, and that the outstanding member of this team is Dragon. Dragon is not a man who can turn into a dragon; he is a dragon who masquerades as a man. Check out this series, please. For the earliest issues, you will probably have to settle for *Early Days of the Southern Knights*, a series of graphic-album reprints, since the very earliest issues of *SK* are hard, if not impossible, to locate."

— Don Thompson
COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE

A COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

"We're not interested in Satan's work."

©1987 Chrysalis Visual

Davis, a woman who saw DARK SHADOWS maybe *twice* when it had originally aired. I sent her a package with a mix of all of our products, including GRENDEL, at which point she told me, "We're not interested in working with you; this is the work of Satan." In GRENDEL the lead *villain* is a vampire.

In DARK SHADOWS the *hero* is the son of Satan —

PETER: *Well, the hero is a vampire, though he fights agents of Satan.*

BOB: But he's still sucking blood out of various humans.

PETER: *Albeit reluctantly.*

BOB: Yes. He doesn't want to but he can't help it. So what is this woman trying to say? There were certainly one or two issues of JONNY QUEST and ROBOTECH included in the package, which couldn't possibly be called satanic. So why she fixated on GRENDEL is obvious: She let her religious zealotry interfere with the job at hand.

PETER: *As I understand it, she did not even know what DARK SHADOWS was about, was horrified to find out, and felt that ABC would not want to license this property.*

DIANA: She claimed it was not in line with ABC's regular programming.

BOB: Now, ABC, where this woman works, has another television show — one of the most innovative characters to come out of television for several thousand years — and we're at the point now where everything is fully negotiated for Comico to be releasing a MAX HEADROOM comic.

PETER: *Very good. And I suppose, too, that is ABC is pleased with the MAX HEADROOM comic, they may be more open to another project.*

DIANA: ABC is not the least concerned.

BOB: The actual license is with Chrysalis, I saw Max as a commercial about two years ago and said, "Wow!" I researched him immediately and found out that he had his own London talk show. I read one article, a little snippet, and that was when I fell in love with Max. The article was about the time Max, as played by actor **Matt Frewer,** interviewed **Sting. Sting** let it slip, in a smug kind of tone, about his indoor pool, and **Frewer** was right there: he said, "Oh, say, I'm impressed," in that smarmy Max way And I read that and went, "Oh, my God!" Here he is taking a rock'n'roll legend and just saying, "Hi, worm. How are you? You want to crawl for me?" It's on TV, it's beautiful, the entire world sees **Sting** as a human being! You know, that happens on JOHNNY CARSON maybe once every 32 years, when **Bill Cosby** comes by and wants to pop **Tommy Smothers** in the nose. Nothing really comes across the tube that is that real, so that turned me on to Max.

"That was when I fell in love with Max Headroom."

PETER: *Are you talking to people about writing and drawing this?*

DIANA: What we're planning with MAX initially is to release a 3-D book, a one-shot. MAX seems to demand something sort of spectacular and unusual like that.

BOB: And he always wears those glasses.

DIANA: Right. **Arnold and Jacob Pander** are very interested in experimenting with the 3-D format, and their style is that sort of new-wave-MAX-HEADROOM-oriented style. We also have plans to do a mini-series in '88, but nothing firm at this point as far as a creative team.

PETER: *Now, what about GUMBY, which you have declared to be the great philosophical work of 1987?*

DIANA: Oh, yeah, except — here's a big secret I'm going to divulge — all those press releases that quote me are written by **Bob Schreck.** I don't really say those stupid things!

PETER: *Are you saying that this is not going to give us a great insight to the meaning of life, and that Bob Burden and Art Adams are not* really great philosophical gurus?

DIANA: Actually, I think they are. That quote I *did* write myself! This is GUMBY done right. **Art Clokey** has let us run with the ball, and we wound up with something completely whacked out from **Bob Burden,** and possibly Arthur's finest work to date.

BOB: There's a lot of realism in GUMBY, mixed with fantasy, mixed with Gumby — this weird little clay thing walking around with a clay pony. They have a tree in the back yard, and actual **Arthur Adams** tree, and you *believe* it, and yet inside is this little clay guy hanging out with his little pony.

PETER: *So it's not quite the cartoons where everything was toys —*

DIANA: Right. It's a curious blend of photo-realism and fantasy elements. **Arthur Adams** is a cartoonist at heart, I think.

BOB: The project was my baby, intially. I didn't want to reiterate something that works well for a five-year-old mentality but starts being inapplicable after age six, so we tilted it just a bit to make it work for 56! I want this to go on record because it was a real special moment: We were talking about GUMBY, Diana was in the kitchen, I was putting a record on the stereo; we knew that Arthur was going to draw the

"Oh — he's a slime — a lowlife!!"

"Bob was well-known for coming to work dressed in . . . non-business suits."

"Bob Burden was deranged enough for GUMBY"

book and she yelled from the kitchen, "You know who would be great to write GUMBY?" And, like a divine light began to glow, I said what she was thinking, **"Bob Burden."** She laughed, "That's right!" It had to be **Bob Burden** because who else was deranged enough to be able to make it work?!

DIANA: Synchronicity abounds. Arthur had wanted to work with Bob and Bob had wanted to work with Arthur. We brought the two of them together and it culminated in this 40-page trip into insanity.

PETER: *Now, does it surprise the two of you that JOHNNY QUEST, a show that was on over 20 years ago, that has had limited revival since, has become one of the three top sellers for Comico?*

DIANA: No, it doesn't. JONNY has been a labor of love for everyone involved. I grew up watching the show, and I have invested an awful lot of my time and energy into the book. **Bill Loebs** was not an ardent watcher of JONNY QUEST — he was a little too old when the first show aired in 1964 to really become enamored — but he is a tremendous writer. With every script, he has delivered not just a plot but a *theme*, which is what's lacking in comics today. We don't get themes anymore. We get pretty much straight plot with sprinkles of characterization thrown in. Bill is doing something more. While we had the rotation of artists, every artist involved was delivering something important and meaningful to them. We had artists clamoring to get on the book because it was a precious moment from their childhood that they wanted to recapture.

When you have that kind of enthusiasm, that translates to the audience, so I'm not surprised that JONNY is selling well. We've recently gone to a regular art team, **Marc Hempel, Mark Wheatley** and **Kathryn Mayer,** and they too are very keen to be working on the book. They did the third issue, as a matter of fact, and the response to their work was phenomenal — not merely positive response but the sort of turnaround response that starts out riding the negative: "Gee, I really thought I wasn't going to like their work on this, but, boy, was I *impressed*." That kind of response really makes you sit up and take notice, you know. So they are delivering a certain love of the characters, of the series, and that's translated into their work and, ultimately, to the reader.

PETER: *And now you're going to be doing SPACE GHOST as a 48-page one-shot. Is this motivated by a "see if you can do it again" feeling?*

DIANA: Actually, the reason to do SPACE GHOST is **Steve Rude,** bottom line.

"Space Ghost could not have purity of vision without Steve Rude."

Because of our relationship with Taft Merchandising, the licensor for JONNY QUEST, we had the option to do SPACE GHOST, and —

BOB: Wait, we negotiated a separate option for SPACE GHOST. We originally negotiated it as a four-issue mini-series and when we realized that Steve didn't have the time to do that, we went back and renegotiated the whole thing to tailor-fit Steve. We didn't want to do it without him, and we will not do it without him. We will not put out issue #32 done by Joe Hack. We don't need that on our record.

DIANA: Yeah. You know, this really is going to sound like a lot of b.s., but we both like to sleep at night. We try to maintain honesty and integrity in order to be able to look at ourselves in the mirror. There is no project that is not worth doing right, and there is no project that is worth doing wrong. SPACE GHOST could not have purity of vision without **Steve Rude.** I think Steve has it in his *heart* and — this goes back to what I said before — if you deliver your heart into a project then that enthusiasm, that love, carries over to the reader. I'm still a reader today. If I don't feel that enthusiasm when I'm reading a book, why should *I care?*

BOB: And why should it be published if that enthusiasm is not there? That is what makes comics reading enjoyable. It's not a joke; it's not a game; it's what makes you get up in the morning; and just because it's a licensed project, that does not mean it has to be complete mush.

PETER: *Also, the QUEST connection led to the RIO graphic novel.*

DIANA: Well, when we first got the license to do JONNY QUEST, who better to kick off the comic series than **Doug Wildey,** the fellow who was most integrally involved with the original show? Then, through a relationship with Doug that was mutually beneficial and mutually enjoyable, he presented us with the option to do RIO in color as a graphic novel. The book spent four months going back and forth from the separator to Comico — that's the kind of care we took with it — to make sure everything was right. Again, why do it if you're not going to do it right?

BOB: In the short run, Comico stands to lose money, but in the long run it's everybody's gain.

PETER: *Because of goodwill buildup you mean?*

BOB: Goodwill, market expansion. GINGER FOX, no one wanted to print it. Everybody turned it down, and —

PETER: *Then why is it Comico decided to do it?*

DIANA: Because it deserved to be done.

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#6

COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION
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"GINGER FOX got us into PLAYBOY."

We knew that we risked taking a bath with GINGER —

BOB: But we felt that it was a bath worth taking.

DIANA: Yes. GINGER is not real accessible to the current comics marketplace. It features a woman, first of all, who is not 20, who is older, a career woman who doesn't wear a skintight costume and doesn't go around punching out thugs. **Mitch O'Connell** did a beautiful job illustrating the book. **Les Dorscheid** did some of his best color work ever. GINGER is like a high tech soap opera, essentially. It's not quite romance but there are a lot of romance elements in the book, and I am a big romance fan.

PETER: *And this moves it into a contemporary look, which is also something you talked about earlier that you feel is very important.*

DIANA: Yes. So, even though the sales have not been rampant, GINGER has certainly held her own and —

BOB: No other book got us into PLAYBOY, into ADVERTISING AGE —

DIANA: STEP-BY-STEP GRAPHICS magazine, PHILADELPHIA magazine; the wire services picked it up, we've had radio exposure and prime time TV news coverage. So, in a promotional sense, GINGER has worked out very well for Comico. In an aesthetic sense also, GINGER is a beautiful book.

BOB: And a great story.

DIANA: One that needed to be done. I think it advanced the medium, and I say hurrah for Comico that they had the balls to do a project they knew might not to be a financial success.

PETER: *What was it like working with Mike Baron on GINGER?*

DIANA: I love **Mike Baron.**

BOB: He's great.

PETER: *Is it true, as Mike Gold says, that he is the David Byrne of comics? (Laughter.)*

DIANA: Yes, that's exactly what he is. Mike is one of the strangest, nicest, funniest —

BOB: Most professional.

DIANA: — people that I've ever had the pleasure to work with. Mike was one of the early supporters of the WIRE. We were correspondents for quite some time during my tenure as editor of THE TELEGRAPH WIRE.

BOB: The best phone etiquette, short and to the point — "Here's my message, I'm out of here."

DIANA: He's a hell of a writer, and I think that's amply demonstrated by every book that he does. He's not writing down to you, and he's very professional in his attitude.

BOB: Writing for the sick and twisted

Foxy Ginger Fox.

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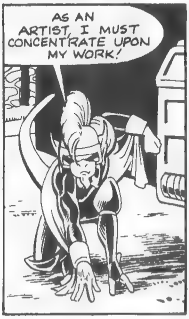
A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM FRED & BIANCA

THIEVERY IS BEST LEFT TO TRAINED PROFESSIONALS! AMATEURS NOT ONLY LOWER THE LEVEL OF WORKMANSHIP THEY COULD ALSO GET HURT!



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"Bill Willingham stood up outraged."

youth of America. *(Laughter.)*

DIANA: Because he himself is a little sick and twisted! *(Laughter.)*

BOB: This man is right here, he knows what we're going through.

PETER: *What you're saying is that he touches upon things that have relevance to what the readership is going through.*

BOB: "MasterCard, I'm bored." That just about sums it up.

PETER: *I heard someone at Marvel ask what that meant. (Laughter from Bob and Diana.)* And then moving on, what is it like working with Matt Wagner on GRENDEL and MAGE?

BOB: Oh, he's a slime, a lowlife!

DIANA: Matt, we love you, too. *(Laughter.)*

BOB: He's frighteningly easy to work with.

DIANA: He is. Matt's a real gem. He's very serious, he's very determined, and he's not a liar. He's extraordinarily honest.

BOB: Painfully honest.

DIANA: He's also extraordinarily talented. He's 26 years old, which is frightening, depressing, considering his tremendous talent and what he's able to accomplish now, and he keeps growing. He forces himself to grow. I really enjoy working with Matt; and as much as so-called editor in chief duties continue to take more of my time away from actual editing duties, I don't think I'll ever want to give up working with Matt. I really admire his ability to tell a story.

PETER: *Might this have anything to do with the fact that the GRENDEL series centers on a female character?*

DIANA: I think Matt's handling of women is particularly good. I really didn't know that he was able to handle women so well. When the Grendel persona does not overtake Christine Spar, what we have is a very full-blooded woman. Christine Spar's best friend, Regina, is kind of a flightly broad, and it surprised me that Matt could write a flightly broad and do it well.

BOB: Not as the cliché'd bubblehead. She has her own motivations that are a little whacky, but they're sound, you can understand her.

PETER: *In these two characters you have such dangers, because one of them could have easily turned into the stereotype aggressive female character that you see in the superhero comics, and the other one could have easily turned into the stereotype airhead.*

DIANA: But he makes them both real. It shouldn't have surprised me but it did, that he was able to write them with such facility.

PETER: *And then you do THE ELEMENTALS and JUSTICE MACHINE. How do you go about doing superhero books for a company that is not one of the big two, when the big two so dominate with superhero books that some of us may feel that we've had it up to here with superhero books?*

BOB: ELEMENTALS isn't a superhero book. It's an occult soap opera.

PETER: *They have got costumes and powers.*

BOB: It really is primarily an occult soap opera using a superhero motif. There is a lot a social commentary that is much more at the cutting edge of what's going on in our society than the Fantastic Four worrying about child abuse in a very safe, staid way.

DIANA: That's true. I do remember last summer, 1986, prior to the release of the New Universe, several Marvel staffers talked about how the New Universe would feature superheroes in the real world —

BOB: The world outside your window.

DIANA: And how this was some kind of terribly original concept. **Bill Willingham** stood up outraged and said, "What do you mean, I've been doing this for a couple of years now!" That's what makes ELEMENTALS different. That's what made it different when it started. And it does raise worthwhile issues of social commentary that deserve to be raised, that young people need to think about, *want* to think about —

BOB: But not too heavy-handedly. He always throws in a little **Whee!** This is supposed to be entertainment, but you can go to the trouble while entertaining to raise some questions.

PETER: *And as for JUSTICE MACHINE?*

BOB: JUSTICE MACHINE in its premise does that, a group of heroes who realized that the government had sold them the wrong bill of goods, a Vietnam mentality, and they were kind of standing there looking like maroons. **Tony Isabella,** with his work in the new series, has given them a lot of depth, a lot of characterization that they didn't have before.

DIANA: Tony's established subplots, interrelationships among the characters, motivations, and he's given them history and background, and done it creatively and in a stimulating fashion. He's definitely delivered an above average superhero book. And I know that when **Doug Murray** takes over the book, he'll do an equally impressive job.

I'm not really against the genre of superheroes, but to some extent I've had them to the max, you know.

BOB: That's not to say that superheroes

Bob Schreck enjoying a quiet moment with MAGE mentor Matt Wagner.

"America loves violence and hates bodies."

DIANA, WHO IS THAT PERSON MANOLI LIKES SO MUCH?
GEE, AMY, HOW CAN YOU NOT KNOW MICHAEL JACKSON?! HE'S THE ABSOLUTE LIVING END, A DREAMBOAT OF A HUNK AND THE CROWN PRINCE OF ROCK'N'ROLL, DON'T THEY HAVE ANY CULTURE AT ALL IN ROME--
--I KNEW UPSTATE WAS REMOTE, GIRL, BUT THIS IS RIDICULOUS!
I AM SORRY...
...TO SEEM SO STUPID.

A free YES-PRIZE will be awarded to the eagle-eyed reader who first spots the four references to Comico's famous couple on this and the following page.

should be banished; just that they should not be the only part of the diet.

PETER: *And they should be done well.*

DIANA: Agreed, and with both ELEMENTALS and JUSTICE MACHINE we go back to the thematic content versus mere plot, whereas many superhero books focus on plot and conflict. I have often heard writers say that the first thing they come up with is the villain when they're plotting a superhero story, as if the villain is the main reason for the hero's existence. They have no point to prove. They just come up with the villain and center the entire issue around some giant fight scene.

Tony and Bill don't do that. They have something different to prove each issue. Again, they give us characterization, interrelationships, history and background in order to make each one of these heroes a living, breathing human being that the reader can care about.

PETER: *Comico also has a part in the Japanese influx into American comics, vis-à-vis* ROBOTECH and STAR BLAZERS.

BOB: If you really sit down and look at ROBOTECH, particularly the MACROSS and NEW GENERATION segments, compared to Saturday morning cartoon mindlessness, the plot lines are a lot more intricate and interesting, even though they have been altered for America. The nudity has been taken out, and a certain amount of the violence has been taken out of it. A good deal was left in, because America loves its violence and hates its bodies!

But ROBOTECH is something we had handed to us on a silver platter, and releasing the three books on a six-week basis, we had to get it out, we had to get it done. We weren't afforded what we're doing on STAR BLAZERS, which is full-process cel animation-like coloring on a four-issue limited series. So, you just do the best you can.

DIANA: I would like to say, though, we're talking about a licensed product here, about adaptation, and what Comico is adapting is something that has already established itself as *worth* adapting, worth licensing. We're talking some real high-class animation here. And whereas the ROBOTECH adaptations are not adaptations of the Japanese shows — they're adaptations of the Americanized version of the Japanese shows — there is a certain hamstringing quality brought on by the Saturday morning Moral

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"I find it very embarrassing . . ."

Majority-type censors that colored the Americanization and consequently our adaptations, but within those boundaries I think we've done a good job. You know, we have to work within the boundaries that are set by our licensors. With STAR BLAZERS, we have the option to do new stories, which we have done. We've had a lot of time with STAR BLAZERS that we didn't with ROBOTECH. More time and freedom usually means a better product.

BOB: And what other licensed property can boast a quote such as: "Vow, that packing crate ate all my geese"? *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *As a couple who work and live together, do you have trouble separating work from your private lives?*

DIANA: Yes. *(Laughter.)*

BOB: Work from our private lives, not our private lives from work.

DIANA: We do take the work home with us. But, in order to keep our personal relationship stable, we're in a position where we *have* to resolve the business conflicts! I think one of the problems at many of the other companies is that business and editorial are always at loggerheads. Whereas Bob and I may be at loggerheads on occasion about specific issues, we battle them out and resolve them, and I really think that is part of what has made Comico as strong as it is.

BOB: I find it very flattering, I find it very embarrassing, and I find that at this point it is enough! *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *Diana, you have popped up not only in JONNY QUEST and in ELEMENTALS, but you have also shown up in NEW MUTANTS.*

BOB: I'm also a Marvel character. I was in HERCULES.

DIANA: I am now copyrighted by Marvel Comics, by **Bill Willingham**, and by Taft Merchandising Group, and if anybody else would like to get some right on me, I'm open to all bribes! *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *So, have I forgotten anything major from Comico coming up besides Harlan Ellison and Ken Steacy?*

DIANA: I think that's it.

PETER: *Well, that was a hint to talk about Ellison. Would you like to go on the record about how Mr. Ellison is so gracious and Mr. Steacy is a nice person?*

DIANA: **Ken Steacy** is a nice guy and a real crazy-man! **Harlan Ellison** has been my hero for quite a long time. I think that he is the consummate essayist, and I love his rabble-rousing, "up against the wall, dirtbag" attitude. When he called up and wanted to do this graphic novel NIGHT AND THE ENEMY, I was thrilled right down to my tippie toes! I subsequently met the man, found him to be honest — sometimes brutally so — extremely funny, extremely gracious, and essentially somebody who would give you just as much as you gave him, and no less. So, yeah, damn right; Comico is — how did you put it — the little something that could . . .?

BOB: The little engine that could.

DIANA: In the last two years, Comico has gone from a company that retailers were laughing at, to a company that is selling its books very well, and on time. We now have a reputation that's strong enough that someone of **Harlan Ellison's** stature has come to us to publish his material. That's a nice pat on the back for all of the work that we've done.

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"Move over Marvel and everybody."

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Geraldine Pecht
Born: 23 November 1960 — Huntingdon Valley, PA
Occupation: Art Director/Production Manager
Credits: Production Manager at Strawbridge & Clothier
Favorite Comic: MAUS
Favorite Movie: TOP HAT
Idol: Lee Iacocca
Pet Peeve: Artists Who Don't Understand Dead Lines!

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Gerry Giovinco
Born: 26 June 1960 — Norristown, PA
Occupation: Publisher
Education: Philadelphia College of Art
Favorite Comic: HOWARD THE DUCK by Gerber
Favorite Movie: THE COLLECTOR
Hobbies: Cars, Costumes, Clowning
Pet Peeve: Toys That Don't Work!

Geraldine modeling GRENDEL sportswear.

GERALDINE PECHT &

Since the creation of direct sales, by virtue of innovations attributable thereto, comics has undergone what can best be described as an industrial revolution. The first wave of that revolution culminated in a market backlash known as Black September. One of the survivors of that terrible month was a small and virtually unnoticed company whose product was considered crude and amateur. That company is today a major name amongst independent comics publishers. They are in the forefront of the quality package movement, and they are known for leading comics in new and rewarding directions. The question is no longer who are they, but rather what will Comico do next — and the story of how they reached this point from those oh-so-humble beginnings is one worth telling . . .

DARREL L. BOATZ: *I'm speaking with Gerry Giovinco and Geraldine Pecht from Comico The Comic Company. An exciting upcoming thing is Comico's fifth anniversary. Five years. What's it like being a successful independent company with a track record?*

GERRY GIOVINCO: A track record, I didn't know we had horses. *(Laughter.)* It's like one of those things that you don't sit down and acknowledge because where we've always come from as publishers is, "Where do we want to *be*?" We're very goal-oriented, and our goals are way out there to a point where they are fantastic and maybe even unrealistic. We don't sit down and, like, relish what we are doing. We say "All right, this is great, let's move on. What's next?" That's really been the course of action that we've taken that got us from what looked like such an amateur stage five years ago to what people respect about our product now.

DARREL: *I remember when Comico first got started, that amateur stage, and I kind of liked some of those books. AZ, SLAUGHTERMAN, they had some originality to them.*

GERRY: Well, I think the one thing about our black-and-white books, if anything, was that they were evidence that we were looking at comics in a little bit of a different way than the way comics had been looked at, that we were a little more well-rounded, that we were looking at the world around us and that we were aspiring to something greater. We then looked at our material and we knew what we wanted but we weren't succeeding at doing it, so we created the company in a way that it could. We changed to color, acquired artists who could visually achieve the goal that we saw. Ever since we made those shifts — took the creative workload from ourselves and passed it on to people whom we had plenty of respect for — Comico has really taken off. It's nothing negative about the concepts in the black-and-white books — I think that there was a lot of good stuff there — it's just that they were a step on our climb to what our next goal would be, you know, to get us where we are now and hopefully where we will be eventually.

DARREL: *In the early days, Comico had one experience which could have sent the company out.*

GERRY: Which one was that? *(Laughter.)* I can think of a bunch.

DARREL: *Well, this one sent a lot of people out, Black September. How did you manage to survive where so many others failed?*

GERRY: Well, my observation of the whole thing was that it was really strictly a matter of being at the right place at the right time; or more specifically *not* being

"We're very goal-oriented, way out."

in the *wrong* place at the wrong time. We were in the middle of the transition from black-and-white to color. Our last book had been produced sometime in the middle of the summer and we had suspended all of the black-and-whites and were working on the first color books. Because we had no product, we weren't owed any money. We didn't have any money spent on a product that we weren't going to see returns on.

Other people had money invested in all sorts of product that they weren't being paid for, so they lost an enormous capital investment. We lost some money when Pacific folded, but not a really significant amount. If that same thing were to happen now — which it did with Glenwood — the numbers there are significantly greater. We're a stronger company now so we can survive that, but back in those days I don't think anybody was *that* strong. The market wasn't that big. Most people who were producing color comics were getting profits that were fairly narrow. Now there's a good profit margin because the market's larger.

DARREL: *So it would be safer for someone to come in right now than it was when you guys first started?*

GERRY: Well, I wouldn't say that's true, for a reason that's almost the inverse of that. When we came out there were only a few people publishing. We had to compete with the loyalties toward Marvel and DC, and it was like we were scratching and clawing for our readership. Now the readers are much more diverse. They're investing their interests in a lot of publishers, but now there are *tons* of publishers. So we're actually more secure because we're an established publisher. Whereas before there were like five new products coming out and people would pick them up and you could get pretty good numbers, now you've got the same number or perhaps even a greater number of fans but they've got 200 new products to look at. So the strength of the consumer dollar is diluted.

DARREL: *Comico, as you indicated, changed over the years. You've got people like Geraldine now as Art Director, whereas when you started it was just a bunch of guys . . . mainly you were each doing your own book.*

GERRY: Right.

DARREL: *How did you go about changing from a company that's just a bunch of guys doing their own books to the company as it is now, with many departments and people responsible for their own departments?*

GERRY: We were self-publishers, we wrote, drew, lettered, inked, published, did all of the marketing, everything ourselves. As we expanded, what we realized was that everything would suffer because you had to be responsible for the

GERRY GIOVINCO

Revealed: The Thing's secret identity — Gerry Giovinco, taking time out from the epic short "The Hulk and the Thing" directed by Bob (John Huston) Schreck.

"We're not satisfied. We want the

next thing and the next thing and the next thing.

GERALDINE PECHT: I don't think you really can be a jack-of-all-trades and still produce the fine quality that we are now. You have to be able to acknowledge and accept your strengths and weaknesses.

GERRY: Yeah.

GERALDINE: I think that's the best step that the company has taken. I've been here for a year, and being departmentalized I feel has really helped. **Phil LaSorda** and Gerry know the comic industry — I know publishing and production — so they are always there to back me up. You know, they've had the hands-on experience in the real comic business end of it.

GERRY: Phil and I, and **Dennis LaSorda** as well, we're entrepreneurial by nature. We have great ideas and we're very creative. We know what sells, we think we have our finger on that pulse, and we've been pretty successful with proving that, as our line is evidence of. But we don't have sophisticated marketing skills, we don't have strong backgrounds in productions or editing or any of those things; so we've put people around us that can now execute those things for us. That is very relieving. It gives us more opportunity to free our minds and come up with another Good Idea, knowing that we have the people there who will execute it for us.

DARREL: *Geraldine, you've lisied your title as Art Director and Production Manager. What does that mean exactly? What do you do?*

GERALDINE: Well, right now I'm wearing two hats. The production end is getting our books to our color separators — who do a fine job, flat color and process — and then being liaison to the printer until each book is completed and shipped out. The art direction end of it is an overall view of the quality that comes in, and promotion work —

GERRY: Designing ads.

GERALDINE: Tons of ads. *(Laughter.)* **Bob Schreck** comes up with some dynamite ideas, and I execute them.

DARREL: *Bob Schreck is...?*

GERALDINE: The Administrative Director.

DARREL: *So he is your immediate superior, in other words.*

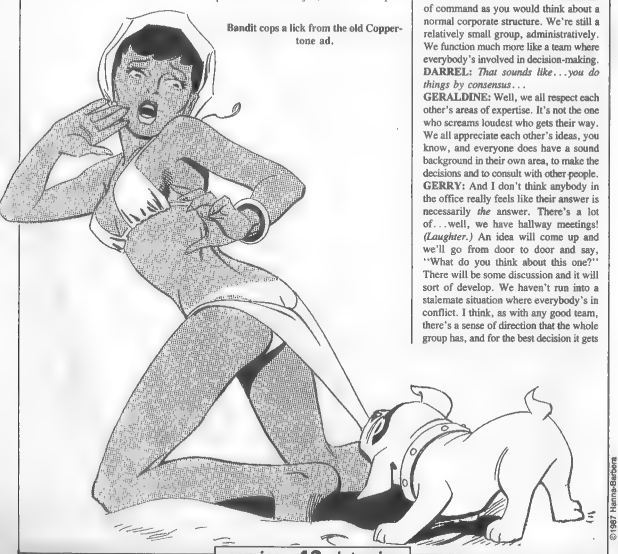
GERALDINE: I kind of answer to everyone at this point! *(Laughter.)* **Diana Schutz,** our editor in chief, she and I work very closely. She and I work the production schedules through, and Bob and I work the advertising end, so like I said I wear two hats at the same time.

GERRY: We don't have a real solid chain of command as you would think about a normal corporate structure. We're still a relatively small group, administratively. We function much more like a team where everybody's involved in decision-making.

DARREL: *That sounds like...you do things by consensus...*

GERALDINE: Well, we all respect each other's areas of expertise. It's not the one who screams loudest who gets their way. We all appreciate each other's ideas, you know, and everyone does have a sound background in their own area, to make the decisions and to consult with other people.

GERRY: And I don't think anybody in the office really feels like their answer is necessarily *the* answer. There's a lot of...well, we have hallway meetings! *(Laughter.)* An idea will come up and we'll go from door to door and say, "What do you think about this one?" There will be some discussion and it will sort of develop. We haven't run into a stalemate situation where everybody's in conflict. I think, as with any good team, there's a sense of direction that the whole group has, and for the best decision it gets



Bandit cops a lick from the old Copper-tone ad.

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bookstore market. We want K-Mart."

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sort of modified and rounded. You know, there are times when you have too many cooks and somebody's going to get ticked off, but I know with myself a lot of times it's just because I've been holding my idea too closely. When I stand back and really look at it after it's been critized enough, then I can see the validity in the suggestions that have been made. We're pretty mature about that.

GERALDINE: Yeah. I don't think anyone lets their ego get in the way at all. That's our *biggest* advantage, working in a group like we are.

Sometimes things must be explained to the other members of the group, like if they don't come from an art background, why certain things work that they're not seeing. Maybe color balance — you know, it might not appeal to them, but it works, or technically it will work in the production end. We might show them a black-and-white piece and they can't visualize it enhanced with color, so they don't see the full picture, and we have to go through and explain it to them.

GERRY: It's actually an asset because if there wasn't somebody there to be critical, it would be very easy to get complacent.

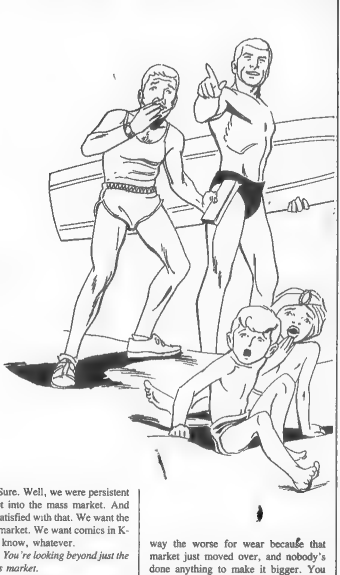
DARREL: *You talked about unreachable goals a little bit earlier. That leads to two questions: What were the unreachable goals that led to Comico reaching the point it is now at? What are the unreachable goals that Comico now has?*

GERRY: Well, I think that we always had this attitude that we were going to compete head-to-head with the "big two," you know. As far was we are concerned we do that now, but we're still not competing on their level. So that's always been one goal: to compete with Marvel and DC. And then what would seem like an unreachable goal, but one I think we all believe that we're capable of doing, is to go beyond that. You know, we don't think that the comic scene in the American market has made a dent into its full potential. Somebody's going to crack that barrier and we're going to see comics just selling like crazy, just like in France and in Japan, and we want to be there when that happens. We'd like to be partially responsible for that, or solely responsible for that.

DARREL: *Okay, one thing — this may be related — you go to a store and you find a comics rack, you'll find the DCs and the Marvels and the Archies, and you will also find Comico comics there as well.*

GERRY: Right.

DARREL: *You don't find First or Eclipse there in the racks at just your regular newsstand.*



GERRY: Sure. Well, we were persistent and we got into the mass market. And we're not satisfied with that. We want the bookstore market. We want comics in K-Mart, you know, whatever.

DARREL: *You're looking beyond just the direct-sales market.*

GERRY: We're looking beyond any known outlet that comics are traditionally sold in.

GERALDINE: I think to grow you have to.

GERRY: I think the scope of the market is way too limited. You know, we've looked at this same picture for 40 years; it hasn't gotten any better, it's just gotten smaller. The direct-sales market was a great innovation but it worked reflexively. All that happened was that all of the people who were avid comic readers in the 7-Eleven and the newsstands now were avid comic readers in the direct-sales market and got their books in much neater condition. Mass market sales are probably way the worse for wear because that market just moved over, and nobody's done anything to make it bigger. You don't see comics at the newsstand and 7-Elevens like you used to see them before. You barely even find a spinner rack anymore in a general store, and it's a shame. So what we need is to create a new outlet.

DARREL: *What sort of new outlets are your looking at?*

GERRY: I was trying to sell Macy's two weeks ago. I was in there saying, "This comic book would look great on your floor." It could be anything, the libraries, the —

GERALDINE: The educational system. It is a great vehicle and I think that's an area to go into.

DARREL: *There are some groups going*

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into the educational market now. Byron Preiss is putting together a package for the educational market.

GERRY: But see, the image of the comic isn't illustrated well enough for the American public. You say "comic books" to Americans and they don't get how accessible it really is, how much it really touches them. They don't look at the daily comic strip and realize what a viable part of their everyday lives that is.

DARREL: *Yeah, people won't realize until PEANUTS isn't there how much they're going to miss it.*

GERRY: Right, right. And the thing about comics is that they satisfy so many needs, or could satisfy so many needs, of the general public. They fulfill the need for a story. You know, you can be totally entertained in 20 minutes by reading a regular monthly comic book. You get your visual need satisfied. We're a very visual society now. So not only do you get your story, you get your visuals, and you get it quick. And you can carry it with you.

DARREL: *And with comics you can go back and repeat that experience as well, which you can't always do with television or movies.*

GERRY: Right, and that improves the experience. It's good for the literacy of the nation. I remember reading comic books when I was a kid and finding stuff in there that I had to go back and look in a dictionary to figure out what a word meant, or expand my knowledge of history to better understand what was going on, or something like that. Just look at an issue of JONNY QUEST; any issue of JONNY QUEST the kid's going to pick something up, you know, or they're not reading that comic book right. And your visual literacy — comics give you a way of looking at the world and being able to pick out what's important. The illustrator, in order to tell the story, has to key you in on what's necessary to look at, what's the important thing. When I watch film or TV now, mostly because of my experience in comics, I can see everything that's happening on the set. I can look at it and pick it apart and see what's happening. So many people, because they're not trained well enough visually, see the whole world go by them like a blur. *(Laughter.)* They don't get it. Comics can help you slow down and be more attuned.

DARREL: *Yes. I often think we're living in a subliminal society now.*

GERRY: Yeah, we are. But the image of the comic book is just... it's not even like it's a bad image, it's *no* image. If I had a dollar for everyone who's said, "They still make comic books?" People don't even know they make them anymore! That's a tragedy!

DARREL: *Are you planning anything special for your fifth anniversary other than this special issue of COMICS INTERVIEW?*

GERALDINE: Well, have you been reading the ads in CBG?

DARREL: *I don't read the ads in CBG.*

GERALDINE: What?!

GERRY: She slaves over those ads! *(Laughter.)*

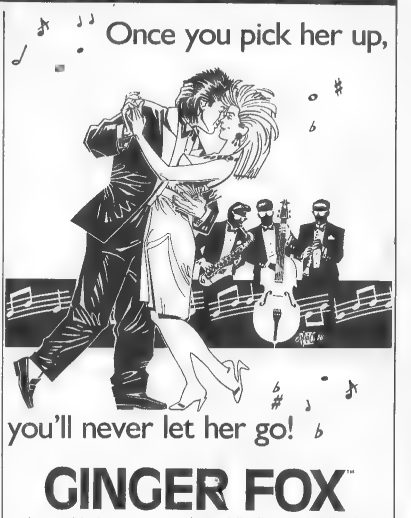
GERALDINE: Read the Comico ads! *(Laughter.)* We're presenting a deluxe slipcase with a GRENDEL theme to it, with silver foil stamping. And within that there will be ten back-issues —

GERRY: No duplicates.

GERALDINE: — and a poster —

GERRY: And a 16-page GRENDEL comic printed in black, red, and white, by **Dean Motter** and **Matt Wagner.** There will be some literature about the company. It's sort of like a Comico introduction, but it's a lot of things. It's a deluxe slipcase that will hold your GRENDEL collection.

GERALDINE: It's also a great Christmas item. It's a real deluxe steal, a $22.00



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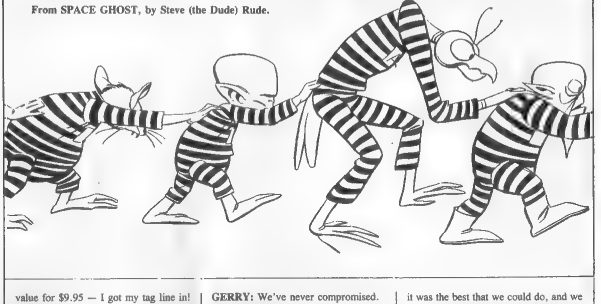

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value for $9.95 — I got my tag line in! *(Laughter.)*

GERRY: Another thing we're doing is THE BLACK BOOK, which is sort of like a five-year historical presentation of the things that we've done over the years, what we currently have in publication, and some of our future projects. There are a lot of people who are still strictly Marvel and DC fans, and it's a chance for them to say, "Well, I'll look in here and see what these guys are up to, maybe I'll find something that I like." It's got a little timeline on the bottom with key events in our history. Also we're doing Comico anniversary parties throughout the country; **Bob Schreck** is coordinating them with the retailers. Artists will be available to go to stores for signings, things like that. It might not look like a big event, five years in the comic-book industry, after Marvel celebrated 25, DC celebrated 50 —

DARREL: *Well, when you consider that Pacific went under after —*

GERRY: Pacific went down, Capital went down, Texas — a lot of different publishers went down.

GERALDINE: But I think we've had so much growth in five years, though, that it's worth celebrating. I don't think any company in a five-year span has grown by the leaps and bounds and produced the volume and the quality of products that our company has.

DARREL: *Well, one thing about the quality of the product that you put out now, from where you started, it doesn't seem like you could have gotten from one end to the other unless you were really concentrating on doing that.*

GERRY: We've never compromised.

GERALDINE: We never scrimp.

GERRY: We've always done our best. Even when we were doing the black-and-white books, it was the best we could possibly do. I think if you look back at them and hold them against anything that's being printed in black-and-white these days, outside of the level of quality of the art, the package is as good as anything that's being produced today. You know, it was the best that we could do, and we just never stopped. We said, okay, what's the next one, and the books keep getting better.

GERALDINE: And you've got to keep looking over your shoulder.

GERRY: Right, at who's catching up.

GERALDINE: That's the key.

GERRY: So we've got a big advantage in that we use the best paper, and best printers, the best color separators. So unless something new comes along the best anyone can do is equal us in production.

GERALDINE: When I decided to come with Comico — I was in the process of job interviewing — I ran into the local comics stores and looked at everyone's comics, and I felt really comfortable when I joined the team. I knew that their books were really high-quality, and coming from the retail industry, I could spot that a mile away. I knew that this team was really, really going somewhere.

DARREL: *So, if you had been turned away by Comico where would you have gone?*

GERALDINE: I would not have selected another comic-book company. I would have continued in retail or gone to an advertising agency. Comico was the only comic company that I wanted to work for.

DARREL: *The biggest advance we've had most recently in product quality has been in the "Dark Knight" format. What are your opinions on that?*

GERRY: There seems to be some misconception that the package itself is what sold that product. I don't know that that's necessarily true. It was an innovative package, but I think so much of it really

"You could package it in toilet paper."

had to do with what **Frank Miller** was doing with the book. I have infinite respect for **Richard Bruning** — his ability to design and put together a package — so much of that *is* his talent in packaging. SPACE GHOST is being produced in that format. It's an attractive package in terms of its marketability because it fits in the racks, it looks like a comic book, and you can squeeze 48 pages in there.

DARREL: *And it doesn't fold over double on itself after a week on the stand.*

GERRY: Right. *(Laughter.)* You know, I think that as an industry it's necessary for us to explore different formats, to try everything possible to make the medium as accessible as it can be to any marketing plan.

GERALDINE: In a sense, though, it doesn't matter. I mean, you could package this thing in toilet paper. If the story and the art aren't good, then it doesn't mean a hill of beans! But it's great to have a nice-looking package because, if we want to go into another market, we have to have something that this outside market can recognize and appreciate.

DARREL: *Something I've been hearing a lot about is the RIO graphic novel.*

GERALDINE: Oooh, it's great.

GERRY: It really is one of the nicer packages. That might sound like our ego tooting itself, but we've had so many people, like **Burne Hogarth,** for example, just rant and rave over it. **Burne Hogarth** is one person who's been trying to gather some respect for the medium for years and years, and to get a compliment from him is just one of the biggest kudos that we could have. And RIO is very much a tribute to **Doug Wildey.** How we felt about Doug and our interest in the RIO project — we put all of that into producing this package. We wanted to see the smile on his face, you know. A lot of real hard production work went into it. It's probably the most difficult book we've ever produced. It had a lot of idiosyncrasies in it.

DARREL: *And you're dealing here with a story that has already been presented.*

GERRY: That's right.

DARREL: *So what do you do when you have something that has already been presented?*

GERRY: You produce it the way it should have been produced in the first place. RIO was always intended to be a graphic novel. That was the way Doug designed it in the beginning, and then the publishing deal he ended up with was at Eclipse, who printed it in 10- and 20- page increments. And each part was produced differently — when you put them together, none of them looked the same — and you couldn't enjoy it as one visually consistent RIO story. We took it and redeveloped all of the artwork so that it was consistent throughout, packaged it in a way that was concise and all-inclusive, and just made the definitive RIO package out of it.

GERALDINE: It's kind of like cable TV — no commercials! *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *And you don't have to wait a month or two between these pages and the next pages.*

GERRY: Yeah. The same thing happened when we produced GRENDEL. I think a lot of people read the backup in MAGE and like it, but maybe didn't follow it because there was a two-month jump between issues. When we packaged all the backups together in the GRENDEL grahic novel, DEVIL BY THE DEED, the story read in a way that I had never even read it. It was incredible. And **Alan Moore's** foreward in that book — he just read the whole thing and exposed every ounce of effort that **Matt Wagner** had put in for the genius that it was.

Another Pecht masterpiece.

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"ROBOTECH opened up a door for us."

"ROBOTECH evolved and became a licensed thing, and there were toys and there was all of this other commerical stuff."

DARREL: *The anthology book seems to be pretty much a dead beast, but if you were planning to do one, what do you think it would be?*

GERRY: Well, the anthology is not a throw-out idea, and we would do one if the right one came along. The thing that's good about an anthology is you can experiment in it, you can try different things. If you can have one that can sustain itself — your goal being to find something in those anthologies that works and can go on, on its own — it's an incredible tool.

DARREL: *Maybe I was a bit hasty in declaring the anthology dead. Perhaps what I should have said was that the continuing story doesn't seem to work in the anthology format anymore; even HEAVY METAL has abandoned it.*

GERRY: Right. Well, it's too little in too short a time to really make that work.

DARREL: *That seems to have been your experience with RIO and GRENDEL.*

GERRY: Yeah, they did not really function well as backup features.

DARREL: *An area that Comico seems to have led the way in is licensed products, and via licensed products, the Japanese market. How did that come about?*

GERRY: Some years ago, **Phil LaSorda** had a conversation with **Carl Macek** and he proposed that we do MACROSS. MACROSS is one great story. We looked at that and said, "Wow, you know, that would be really great!" We weren't thinking in terms of licensing — we were thinking we were going to get an opportunity to tell a great story that deserved to be told in English, and we'd be doing everybody a cultural favor because we'd be translating some Japanese material, and it would be exciting. And in the course of all that, ROBOTECH evolved and it became a licensed thing, and there were toys and there was all of this other commercial stuff. We originally wanted to produce a good MACROSS book, so what we got to produce were *three* good ROBOTECH books, adaptations of three classic Japanese series, one every two weeks. And that opened up a door for us because we got to prove that we could take a licensed property and produce it well.

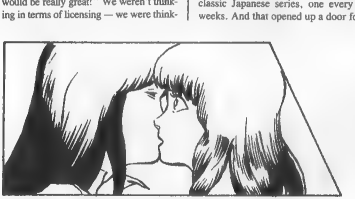
We then were able to approach Taft Merchandising about one of our all-time favorites, JONNY QUEST. They said all right, pulled it out of some piles, blew the dust off it, and we started producing JONNY QUEST with vigor. We just love the character, and everybody who's worked on it has loved it. In every issue you can tell, no one has ever dropped the ball on that book. It's always been produced with the greatest amount of integrity.

GERALDINE: And I think every artist enjoys working on it. They all can identify with it because they all grew up with it.

DARREL: *Yes, I remember avidly watching the series, you know, lying down in front of the TV set.*

GERALDINE: I can hear the drumbeats now. *(Laughter.)*

GERRY: Yeah. The best thing about JONNY, when you read the comic book — I think when you read a comic that translates a TV series, you almost expect that something is going to get lost in the translation, and I was a little bit afraid that that was going to happen with JONNY no



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"There will never be a Comico Universe."

matter how much effort we put into it. But when those first few books came out — well, **Bill Loebs'** writing is just so incredible when you read that material the whole experience you had when you were a little kid, watching JONNY QUEST, comes back. You get the same kind of rush, and that for us is the greatest success.

We're doing SPACE GHOST now, and we would *never* have done SPACE GHOST if we couldn't have gotten **Steve Rude** to do it. We knew if there was one person that was going to make SPACE GHOST a special package it was Steve. We look at licensed products just like we look at any creator-owned property and give it 110% like anything else, and it shows up in the sales figures!

DARREL: *You are also doing GUMBY. . .is it a one-shot or is it a series?*

GERRY: It's a one shot, dammit! *(Laughter.)*

GERALDINE: It's really great.

GERRY: Definitely. **Bob Burden** was the perfect writer. **Art Adams** was the perfect artist, and it really gelled into one incredible package. What's great about GUMBY is it's another example of our attention to a licensed product. It really is a lot of fun, and it's within the tradition of the Gumby mythos, but it goes beyond that, transcends it. **Art Clokey** was involved with it, too, throughout the stages of production. GUMBY's going to have been on sale for a while by the time this interview comes out, but I think it's going to be one of the hottest books of this summer.

DARREL: *With the current state of the marketplace, I sometimes think I'm lucky if I just* hear *about half the stuff I don't see! And of the stuff I hear about, I'm never really sure whether it comes out or not, but the Comico stuff seems to come out pretty regularly.*

GERRY: Right.

DARREL: *I can't think of anything that you had announced that I couldn't find —*

GERRY: Right.

DARREL: *— except for some of the black-and-whites, back in the early days.*

GERRY: Well, yeah. We have had a consistent record since February of 1985, a solid record, and that's primarily due to the acquisition of **Diana Schutz** as editor in chief. She created our production schedule and made sure that it was maintained. She built fail-safes into our production schedule so that in the event that an artist would be late, we'd be able to rectify the situation. And if all else fails, if the art somehow does not get produced — we solicit four months in advance for any product, you know — if we do not have the completed package in hand, then we won't solicit for it.

DARREL: *That sounds like a reasonable practice there. From my perspective, it seems like all of these things being announced and never showing up has been one of the most disruptive influences in the market.*

GERRY: Yeah. I was talking to **Milton Griepp** at Capital City and he will shortly be producing. . . I don't know exactly what he called it, but it's a percentage chart of how many books came out that were promised. He said of the top five publishers, we were the only one with 100% success rate.

DARREL: *Where do you see Comico five years from now?*

GERALDINE: Move over Marvel and everybody!

DARREL: *Is there going to be a Comico Universe?*

GERRY: There will never be a Comico Universe. We're not into creating a universe. Each title is its own universe and that's the way we like it. You don't see publishers of anything other than comics creating universes for their entire line of publications, and we don't intend to. If you are a GRENDEL fan, you read good GRENDEL stories. If you are an ELEMENTALS fan, then you read good ELEMENTALS stories. Those creators spend all of their energies creating their own universe, and who are we to muck it up by trying to stuff in a marketing ploy? That will never happen.

But I think in five years you'll see Comico involved with a lot of unusual and strategic marketing approaches. You'll see us involved with licensing from the other end. We have some film options sold already. In five years we hope to be just that much more significant.

Gerry Giovinco: Comico's gain and the fashion industry's loss. Another modeling career bites the dust.

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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS INTERVIEW

#52

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

DIVERSITY = SUCCESS FOR COMICS INTERVIEW

Dear David,

I must say that it was nice to get a small mention in the **Rozakis/Bruning** interview in #45! However, I think that **Bob Rozakis** was being much too modest. Rather than calling himself "**T.M. Maple** before **T.M. Maple** was invented," I think *I* should be calling myself "**Bob Rozakis** after **Bob Rozakis** was invented" or, if that's too confusing (and it probably is!), maybe "the next Bob Rozakis"! But say, didn't you ever think that I might really *be* **Bob Rozakis?!** Think about it... Yeah, that's it! The new **T.M. Maple**! A lean mean letterhacking machine! The tough and terrible Torontonian — that's me! If it turns out that I am not indeed **Bob Rozakis**, then at the very least he'd have to be my *idol*!

However, I'm afraid I can't use my new mean personality in reviewing #45, since it was a pretty darn enjoyable issue all round! Naturally, the **Bruning/Rozakis** interview was just fine. The look at the "production" end of comicdom was interesting and I hope to see more of this in CI — not the least in the second installment of this interview next issue! (And speaking of things **Maple**, will the second part of the interview uncover the significant role that **Richard Bruning** played in the making of the **Maple** (ahem) Legend?! Ooooo, a mystery!)

Otherwise, the contents of the issue demonstrated a diversity that I think is important to the success of this publication. The **Moebius** and **Loffficier** pieces afforded a look at the important European scene, the influence of which will hopefully continue to grow in North America. The **Woggan/Rausch** interview turned out to be an enlightening peek at an early — and different — type of comics fandom. Finally, the **Roger Armstrong** article is another of your features that have shown us the person behind some comics work that we have all seen — but we never knew much (if anything!) about *who* did it.

Fun, interesting, enlightening, wide-ranging — and I got my name in, too! That's a good issue, I guess! (And, by the way, I'm not *really* **Bob Rozakis!** Am I?)

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CENSORSHIP = MEDIOCRITY

Dear David.

The only reason that I'm against censorship in comics is that I don't want to see something I truly enjoy turned into Saturday morning cartoon mediocrity by people who don't even have the courtesy or the integrity to read the comic they arrogantly condemn.

While it's rare that I see a comic book cover (usually underground comics) that I find disgusting, I don't attack its existence, I just don't buy it! Sure I could complain, but what if there's someone who wants to read it? I won't interfere, because I sure as hell don't want anyone to get in the way of what I enjoy.

If you want to know what a comic book under a rating system would be like, read **John Byrne's** SUPERMAN. Pretty art, but it's like reading a coloring book. Bland and boring. I'm surprised **Byrne** would constrain his writing, which had been excellent before. (I remember at the 1980 Chicago Comicon he brought his private sketch book of superheroes, or specifically supe heroines, that was just wild, and great. (If you're a **Byrne** fan, you haven't seen anything until you see that book.) To me censorship just limits the imagination.

And censorship as a protection against a mother's complaint? You're always going to have some mothers complain, or some idiot who has to justify his existence, even on something as lame as an Archie comic.

But I don't worry about it. Books that don't meet my expectations I don't buy. I just wait it out and support the comics I like by buying them. And respecting the artists for doing what they want without compromise.

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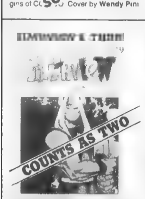

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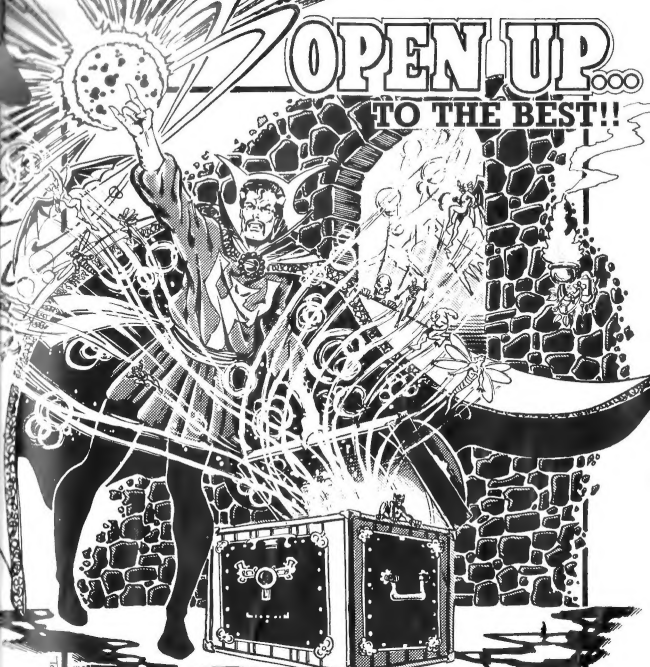

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Comics Interview

So far, there are only four titles from David Anthony Kraft's publishing company, but I like all of them.

• *MICRA* is an acronym for *M*ind *C*ontrolled *R*emote *A*utomaton. It is also one heck of a good comic book by Lamar Waldron and Ted Boonthanakit. This is a 12-issue limited series about a crippled woman who can project her consciousness into an automaton (see the title).

That is a much-too-simplified summation of a rich, complex SF novel in comic-book form. Ted's art has been compared to many different American artists (none of whose work Ted has seen; he was born in Thailand and grew up in Africa) and is remarkably clear and exciting.

Grade: A.

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• *Aristocratic X-traterrestrial Time-Traveling Thieves* (*X-Thieves* for short) has had two first issues, which is annoying to indexers and compilers of price guides, but the bright, sprightly scripts by Henry Vogel and the appropriately humorous art of Mark Propst make up for that. One of the main features of this comic book is that, like the *Mad* comic books, the panels are filled with gags, such as the crisis hotline which warns: "New universe forming — disaster imminent!"

The Southern Knights make a guest appearance in the second first issue, in which the X-Thieves steal the formula for original Coca-Cola. This is one of the best of the funny comic books (and one of the handful that really *is* funny).

Grade: A.

X-THIEVES™

SOUTHERN KNIGHTS™

• I haven't seen the last couple of issues of *Southern Knights* yet but, unless the series has gone radically downhill since #16, this is still one of the best and most original of all the supergroups. Grade: A.

• While *Comics Interview* is not a comic book, I think I can squeeze in a recommendation. This excellent publication gives a well-rounded view of the industry, with interviews with writers, pencillers, inkers, letterers, colorists, and others.

Naturally, your interest in an issue will depend on who is being interviewed, but there have been 40 issues of *Comics Interview* and no totally dull ones — not even the *G.I. Joe* issue. Grade: A.

Four titles.
Four As. Four for four. Way to go, Dave.

— Don Thompson
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